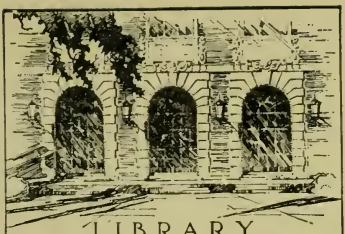

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FARNORTH.

By THEO. KENNEDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Dedicated to Myles Kennedy,

With the Affectionate Regards of the Writer.

FARNORTH.

CHAPTER I.

EIGHTEEN years ago! A great many changes have taken place since that period. Wonderful events have come to pass since then.

Eighteen years ago! The commercial treaty was undreamt of, and crinoline unknown. Stiff collars tortured our miserable ears, and a Niagara of satin flowed into our waistcoats.

Eighteen years ago! Stout Mr. Smith, of the firm of Orleans & Co., armed with an umbrella, rushed with coward haste across the Channel, and the inscrutable one was in the throes of that *coup d'état*, which was to work so many mighty changes in civilized Europe.

Eighteen years ago! The heroes of Alma, Inkermann, and the Redan were callow ensigns, glorying in three-cornered tarts and cherry bounce.

Eighteen years ago! King Midas reigned, though slightly tottering on his throne, and Countess Lola scattered terror in the breasts of Jesuits. Where are they now, these two last, the Steam King and the Comtesse de la Cirque? Poor dethroned monarch of Scrip! Is there anything of Midas left you, but the ears? I fear me not. And the beautiful sinner, who set society at defiance, and for the sake of whose black-lashed violet eyes a doting king gave up his crown: where is she? Dead, your worships. Grim paralysis and penitence laid her prostrate in her prime. The rising generation know nothing of Lola, and 'tis just as well they do not.

Eighteen years have wrought some changes in you and me, dear middle-aged reader. The halcyon days, when our whiskers were beyond suspicion, and not a button of our waistcoats overtasked, are over. Wisdom has set in with our wrinkles; though faith in earthly things may have vanished in company with our teeth and hair. We have had our sorrows; we have buried many bright hopes, beautiful beings, healthy enough to all seeming, but sickening and dying notwithstanding. We have had our joys perhaps. We have grinned, and mouthed it finely in our

motley, *nous autres*, and now, alas! there is but little left to us. We are only banner-bearers on this mortal stage, no chance of playing Hamlet or Macbeth, so we will pose ourselves as best we may, and flutter our colours jauntily.

Eighteen years ago, we, the inhabitants of Farnorth, the most picturesque corner of Blankshire, were by no means so well up with the world as we are at present. Steam had not penetrated our lovely hills and dales — Madame La Mode ignored our existence: she comes to us now in twenty-four hours direct from Paris, and bedizens our wives and daughters in her newest fancies. Her mighty influence has extended to our poorest rustics. She has swept away the linsey-woolsey petticoat, the short jacket, and the snowy mob cap, and supplanted them with crinoline and shabby finery. I do not think we have gained much by this last change.

Nature has been no step-dame to Farnorth. She has scattered her choicest gifts with a prodigal hand: she has given to this favoured district undulating plains, with a distance of azure mountains, steep crags clothed with lichens and brightly tinted heather, hedge-rows green with fern and gay with flowers, tiny cataracts sparkling in the

sunshine, little rivers winding through hill and dale as though in tender haste to rest upon the bosom of the sea, feathery larches, wooing the soft south wind, graceful as exotic palms.

All these and many other beauties has Nature bestowed on Farnorth. I have not half exhausted the catalogue. Moreover, the riches are not all upon the surface. Deep down in those lovely hills and dales lie hidden veins of choicest metals. As you wander along among the green fields you will come upon enclosures of shafts and trams, and straight tall chimnies. Unsightly murky-looking spots these are; blots upon the fair landscape in the eyes of every one, save those of the fortunate proprietors. [Fortunate proprietors, indeed, they frequently are, expanding from comparative poverty into chronic opulence with the aid of these disfiguring objects.]

Nearly all the peasantry of Farnorth are miners. You will meet them on every side, their faces stained with the rich red ore, giving them an appearance not unlike Pawnees. They are infinitely more picturesque-looking than their coal-gummed brethren of Northumberland and Durham. These miners are a hard-working, harmless race enough, without any special evil

characteristic, unless drunkenness be considered one. Their interests are bounded by their district, and those living twenty miles beyond are regarded as "offcomes" and foreigners. They speak the very broadest patois; they have a strong sense of humour, but they can scarcely be considered very intellectual. They take little or no interest in politics; and so long as no Act is passed to restrict them in their beer, I do not think there is much chance of a rising amongst them.

As a rule the men are infinitely superior to their wives (I am speaking of Farnorth working men, not of men in general, Messieurs et Mesdames). These ladies are not remarkable for reticence, and their conversation is calculated to appal fastidious ears, it is so very freely besprinkled with strong adjectives. They have forgotten their catechism—if, indeed, they ever knew it—and do not comport themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters. They will not recognise caste, and their easy familiarity would scare a fine south country lady into fits.

Farnorth has its market-town, and its society. This latter abounds in cliques, which require the ingenuity of Dickens' artist in hair properly to define. I will not attempt it, feeling myself

totally unequal to such a delicate task. I am writing now of eighteen years ago, although I speak in the present tense.

The lovely hills and dales are dotted with handsome houses. Foremost amongst them stands Foxcroft, the residence of the Plantagenet family. The old baronet, a very notorious man in his day, is dead. It is said the death of his eldest son killed him; but I do not attach much faith to that little romance. Sir Mortimer, the present baronet, has been of age for some years now; but he lives abroad with his mother and sisters. Foxcroft is a fine old building, having the remains of a moat and portcullis, dating heaven knows how far back. The Plantagenets are no gourds, I can confidently assure you. The park is very fine; but it is intersected with iron railings, and each enclosure is tenanted by milch cows, belonging to the different farmers in the neighbourhood. Foxcroft dependents have been known to shed tears of agony over this last terrible fact. There is also a lack of timber about the property; many trees have been ruthlessly felled lately. The old baronet, Sir Mortimer Plantagenet Plantagenet, was very wild in his youth, and on intimate terms with the first gentleman in Europe.

[A portrait of that padded old profligate, taken in his latter days, when he might be called the wreck of the Royal George, faces you as you enter the large dining-hall.] It is whispered that all the unentailed part of the Foxcroft estate—a very considerable portion by the way—is heavily mortgaged, and that necessity more than inclination exiles the present baronet.

That handsome Gothic house, with its straight walks and quaintly clipped evergreens, is the property of Giles Houndly, Esq., one of Her Majesty's justices of the peace for the county. Some years ago this gentleman was not by any means so prosperous as he is now. It was a grand thing for him when the heiress of Gothic Hall fell in love with, and married him. Giles is a widower now; he is as welcome at some of the houses in Farnorth as flowers in May, for he is the purveyor in general, as well as the principal incubator, of all the malicious scandal and gossip which is hatched in the neighbourhood.

That pretty cottage with its sloping lawn, its trim beds, and its wilderness of roses, is the dwelling place of two maiden ladies, and was, until lately, the home of their nephew. I can remember to this day what a commotion the

advent of these good people occasioned in Farnorth. How it knitted its brows and shrugged its shoulders at the scandal of two young women (the eldest was scarcely thirty then), alighting as it were from the clouds, bringing with them a little boy—for whose presence they offered neither apology nor explanation—and betaking themselves to humble apartments in the High Street of the market town! The local Mrs. Grundy was frightfully outraged, and the delinquents formed the principal topic of conversation at the card-parties for months. Giles Houndly, Esq.—he was then a solicitor in very poor practice—had a greal deal to say on this subject, he delivered himself of many brilliant speeches, quite outshone himself in short, and with his usual benevolence penetrated into the sanctum of the ladies, and presented them with a choice nosegay, culled with the greatest care from every hotbed of scandal in the neighbourhood. He did not, however, gain much by this. To all his hints and innuendoes about the boy, he received but one answer—the child was their orphan nephew. Their purses, poor ladies, were evidently light enough when first they came; how otherwise would they have reconciled themselves to those mean rooms, and to that dirty old

termagant, their landlady? Some five or six years after their arrival, considerable property reverted to them. They were not much more communicative on this subject than they had been on others; but it gradually became known that Major-General Snowe, H.E.I.C.S., had left to his beloved nieces, Alathea and Mary Snowe, the sum of five-and-twenty thousand pounds in the three per cent. consols; and when, subsequently, they applied for and purchased the cottage they now occupy, Farnorth smoothed out all the wrinkles on its forehead, and held out the right hand of fellowship. It was by no means cordially grasped at first, but time works wonders, and the Misses Snowe being possessed of gentle and forgiving natures, gradually allowed themselves to drift into acquaintanceship and even friendship with some of the families in the neighbourhood. Not long after the descent of the golden shower, young Horace, the principal cause of Mrs. Grundy's convulsions, was sent to Sandhurst, and in due course a commission was purchased for him in her Majesty's service. He has grown up a noble-hearted, handsome man, and his two aunts wept unceasingly for days when he sailed for India, three months ago, to join his regiment there.

The market-town of Farnorth is old-fashioned and quaint-looking enough, its one High Street is its glory. The parish-church is built in the good old style, and the service is conducted after the good old fashion. Our white-haired pastor would as soon think of picking your pocket as departing one iota from the beaten track made sacred by the footsteps of our forefathers. When the last curate—he came straight from Oxford and brought his young sister to live with him, and they were both wonderfully popular before this unhappy event—when, I say, the handsome Oxonian and his pretty sister undertook the decoration of the church at Christmas—holly had been permitted from time immemorial to hang from the old arches at this festive season—confiding Farnorth consented, unsuspicious of evil; but when the day arrived, and the startled congregation saw, lurking amongst the holly, *scarlet crosses* made of its berries—when their eyes fell upon green wreaths above the altar, where here and there artificial flowers showed their brazen meretricious faces, the hubbub and commotion were something terrible. Giles Houndly, Esq., was very busy, you may rest assured, and babbled loudly of the scarlet lady. The poor young curate and his pretty sister

could make no stand against the storm; Farnorth had raised its banner of "No Popery," and waved it wildly aloft. The unhappy criminals were glad enough to rush away and shelter themselves in some less conservative district. Last Christmas, the good old pastor and his new coadjutor did not venture to admit even the green holly into the sacred edifice.

Dr. Banques—I very much doubt whether he has any legal right to the prefix, but we give surgeons and apothecaries brevet rank in Farnorth—Dr. Banques occupies the large white house in the middle of High Street. Allopathy reigns supreme amongst us; Homœopathy does not dare to show its cloven foot. We believe in blue-pills, black-draughts, and occasional blood lettings. Mr. Sparkles is our principal legal adviser. He succeeded Giles Houndly, Esq., when that gentleman rose to marital preferment, but he has a much better practice than his predecessor had. He lives in that house with the two large bay-windows immediately facing you as you enter the town of Farnorth.

There are a great many more handsome houses both in the town and neighbourhood, but as the occupants of most of them will only form a part in my choruses I do not intend to give them any special mention.

CHAPTER II.

THE last rays of a bright September sunset lit up the latticed windows of Gothic Hall, and spread a golden nimbus around the scanty locks which fringed the otherwise bald head of its proprietor.

Mr. Giles Houndly sat with his legs under his mahogany. He was already discussing a bottle of port; but the empty chair opposite, the wine-glasses and damask napkin symmetrically arranged, as also the display of dessert, a little beyond the almonds and raisins of every-day life, indicated to a discerning mind, the coming of a visitor.

Mr. Houndly digested his dinner with the easy conscience of a man who had done his duty to the world in general, and to Farnorth in particular. Alone and unaided he had represented Justice on the bench that day. He had balanced the scales with an unerring finger. Two votaries of Bacchus, taken red handed, had been condemned to

imprisonment, and four luckless urchins convicted of turnip stealing would writhe under the birch to-morrow.

"Turnip stealing," said the balancer of the scales, as he pronounced sentence on the culprits, "is an easy road to the gallows, and drunkenness so much the vice and curse of this district, that if I had my way I would withdraw the licences from all the beer-shops in the neighbourhood."

The rich red juice in the old-fashioned cut-glass decanter was fast disappearing and transferring some of its colour to the face of the imbiber as it made its transit.

"What on earth keeps Sparkles, I wonder," he murmured impatiently; "I said six o'clock sharp. He can be punctual enough when he has money to earn. So, here he is at last. Why Sparkles, how late you are; I was just giving you up."

The tardy guest, a handsome man of more than middle age, was not very profuse in his apologies.

"Sit down, sir; sit down," said bustling Giles. "Which wine will you take? Try the port—it is genuine thirty-four. You will not drink such wine, sir, every day out of your six-and-eight-pences, I know. And now Sparkles—I say—is the news true? All Farnorth rings with it."

"What news do you mean?"

"Oh come now, that won't do sir; as if you had not heard all about it. Helped to draw out the new lease, too, I'll be bound. Sam Gravell, sir, is the very luckiest old rascal in Christendom. Here's the lease of that swindling mine of his just run out after half Farnorth had burnt their fingers with it, and down comes a man, from goodness knows where, who applies for a new lease, and offers at the same time an increase of dead rental. The man must be a fool sir, whatever else he may be. Whom will he bank with, I wonder? The Blankshire Company, I suppose. I advise the old birds to look sharp about them, for ten to one the man is an adventurer."

"The Blankshire Company are not remarkable for keeping their eyes shut."

"No, to give them their due, that they're not," assented Giles; "but wide awake as they are they have been taken in before now, so I repeat sir, they had better not be too confiding. Gravell will be perky enough now sir. He was rather down in the mouth when the last company would not have the lease renewed. They tell me this adventurous gentleman wishes to rent Becklands. It will take no small income to keep that place up

decently, I can tell you. Has Crœsus tumbled in amongst us, sir?"

"Really I cannot say," replied his visitor. "You seem to know a vast deal more about the matter than I do. And now I must say good-bye, for I have to call at Rose Cottage on my way home."

"What! business with the old ladies so late as this? I should think they might wait until to-morrow morning. I suppose they are in the Slough of Despond for the loss of their big soldier. They say, sir, that Miss Mary bewails him more like a mother than an aunt."

I must observe *en passant* that "they say" was Mr. Houndly's Mrs. Harris. Now the principal mission of that puppet of the immortal Mrs. Gamp was, if I remember aright, to sound the amiable lady's praises on all and every occasion. The "they say" of Giles Houndly was an ambiguity under the which he sheltered himself when he shot that venom which prudence otherwise would have compelled him to restrain.

"I believe both the good ladies were greatly distressed to part with him," said Mr. Sparkles, gravely; "and no wonder—I do not know a finer fellow breathing than Horace Snowe."

"Horace Snowe, or Horace anything, sir, would do just as well, I expect. Well, if you must go, you must; so good evening to you sir. As close as wax," he added when his visitor was out of hearing. "I would have seen him somewhere though before I would have decanted my thirty-four for him, had I suspected he would have been so deuced mute. However, I shall hear more about this affair to-morrow. The town was full enough of it this morning."

And the town was full enough of it the next morning, and for several mornings afterwards. Farnorth had not had such a pleasant morsel of gossip for months. 'Weasle Mine—the royalty dues were payable to Mr. Samuel Gravell—had been the *bête noire* of almost every speculator in the district. The first company who took the lease—it is more than twenty years ago now—were cautious men, who, after a short time wriggled out of the business, contriving to dispose of their shares at a considerable profit. Giles Houndly was one of the wrigglers. Their successors soon wearied of the Weasle and got rid of their shares and plant, at a dead loss, to some enterprising adventurers. This last company, to give them their due, battled manfully against the

water, the rock, and the running sand, which were the agreeable characteristics of the Weasle. These three giants proved, however, in the end too strong for them, and for years before the lease had expired the luckless tenants had not attempted to raise an ounce of ore; but were glad enough to get off by paying a dead rental to their landlord.

No wonder Farnorth cackled considerably when another voluntary victim to its Minotaur appeared *en scène.*

The victim, attended by a black servant clad in quiet livery, had arrived at the Crescent Hotel in High Street, some three or four months ago. It was the sable accompaniment that acted as a flourish of trumpets, and arrested popular attention in the first instance. Mine host and hostess of the Crescent Hotel, spoke loudly in praise of the stranger. Never had they had such a liberal lodger. In the eyes of these simple people, he was a Monte Christo. He certainly had an amazing amount of energy. He lost no time in securing Becklands, when he heard that desirable ready-furnished family mansion, with its lands and tenements, was to let. As soon as he had concluded his arrangements, he took his departure

from Farnorth; and when he loomed on that place again, it was as the master of Becklands, in company with his young daughter, her French governess, and a modest retinue. All "offcomes," our red-ochred peasantry said.

The Sunday after their arrival, every eye in the parish church was focussed in eager expectancy on the Becklands pew. Every eye was doomed to disappointment, for no one appeared, and whispers of "Papistry," and what was scarcely worse "Atheism," swept like a sirocco down the aisles. The storm was allayed, and all suspicion of a lack of orthodoxy put to flight on the following Sunday. The new arrival, his young daughter, and her French governess, occupied the large square pew, and the two former were attentive auditors to the good pastor's discourse.

Mr. Harding—so the present tenant of Becklands was named—was a tall, handsome man, of possibly some fifty years of age. His eyes and his hair were so dark, as to give him almost a foreign aspect. There was force and character in his face, and also strength as well as symmetry in his muscular frame. His daughter, a slight, graceful girl, just entering her teens, greatly resembled him. Madame was a buxom-looking per-

son, essentially Parisian in her appearance. Her toilette was unexceptionable. Her bonnet, her shawl, her dress with its many flounces, her gloves of such perfect fit, her parasol in such exquisite taste, absolutely brought tears into the eyes of Miss Benton, the principal modiste in Farnorth.

Madame yawned through the service, and did not listen very attentively to the sermon. She understood very little English, she said; but I am afraid if she had been ever so proficient, she would not have made much effort to pick up the pearls that were so plentifully scattered from the pulpit.

She surveyed the congregation with weary discontented eyes. What wretched toilettes! she thought, with a shrug of her ample shoulders. How was she to endure her *triste* existence; "parmi ces sauvages." Some of these blonde Meeses would be pretty well if they were "bien mise;" but dressed as they were—"Ma foi!"

The congregation in their turn, being soaked and saturated in the præ-Waterloo prejudices against our lively neighbours across the Channel, were gazing at her with distended nostrils, and curling lips, thinking what a dreadfully artificial creature she was. Now to do poor Madame only

moderate justice, apart from the modish bonnet, dress, gloves, &c., &c., she was, I devoutly believe, very much as nature had made her; but Farnorth doubted her from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot. They doubted her hair, her eyes, her eyebrows, her forehead, her cheeks, her lips, her teeth. It was all art, Farnorth said.

No one called on the new-comers. Farnorth has learnt some lessons: she does not admit into her society *any* person who does not bring letters of introduction to some one in the neighbourhood. The first, second, and third formation of our upper strata, are all equally tenacious on this point.

I am obliged to confess the Becklands people were, to all appearance, very contented under this social taboo. Madame, attended by a neat groom, took daily drives with her young pupil, and Mr. Harding was evidently entirely absorbed in his new undertaking.

The borers were very busy on the Weasle Mine for many months, without any great result, and popular interest was gradually fading away, when it was startled into new life again by a report, that in one of their beer houses, the Weasle miners had boasted they had come upon, "sic a sop o' ore, as the like had nivver been hard tell on by

any o' t' mouldy warps in t' nebburhood." This report was, in more elegant language, subsequently confirmed by both the 'Farnorth Advertiser' and the 'District Reflector.' [It was the contradictory statements in those two weekly vehicles of local information, which led to that celebrated correspondence in their several papers, between Scylla and Charybdis, which you must most of you remember. What wonderful letters they were! How rich in italics. How keenly cutting the cool irony of Scylla; how courageously and savagely personal the abuse of Charybdis! Since the days of Junius and Sir William Draper, we have never had anything at all equal to them.]

When first the news of the treasure trove reached the ears of Giles Houndly, Esq., that gentleman was in a great way, and discharged many explosive syllables; but Nature, in her benevolence, has planted the dock very closely to the nettle, and the healing herb shortly presented itself to our friend suffering from the sting occasioned by the sudden prosperity of his neighbour, and rubbed out the smart, by suggesting the delicious thought of the mortification this intelligence would bring with it to the last company who had exhausted so much time and money on the

Farnorth Minotaur; straightway Giles rushed to those unhappy moles, stamped his stick on the ground, cleared his throat, and spoke in his own pleasant and peculiar fashion:—"Ahem! this man has got brains, sir, whoever he may be. They say the mine has had no chance before, because it has never been properly worked. What do you think? I always said the ore lay where they have now found it, and I told What's-his-name so, and wanted him to sink a shaft there when we first started the mine years ago, but he was so mighty clever and would have his own way."

It was pretty soon evident that these three giants, who had lorded it so grandly and tyrannically for so many years, had no chance whatever against the war persistently waged against them by the present proprietor of the Weasle. Mighty engines sucked up giant Water, and forced it all red, hot, and bubbling, to the surface, to find a new home where best it could. Gunpowder, unsparingly used, blew giant Rock into fragments; and as to giant Sand, layers of cold, wet, uncomfortable straw quite spoilt its holiday, and damped its running propensities. Farnorth looked on in amazement. The time-honoured buckets, the tumble-tree, the windlas and gin, gave place to

the bogie and cage worked by steam-engines of goodness knows what power. Trams were laid to the nearest port, and the quantity of ore shipped in one year from the Weasle dwarfed into nothingness the combined efforts of all the iron-ore companies for twenty miles round.

"Money is character," saith the sage, and even the prospect of it will go a long way towards giving you a good one in this discriminating world of ours. Very soon after Mr. Harding's good fortune was officially confirmed, the first clique of our Farnorth Society decided, in solemn conclave, that it would perhaps be better after all, you know, to waive all ceremony, and call upon these people. The second and third cliques, with their different declensions, only waited the decision of their leader to follow abjectly in its footsteps, and so it came to pass, that for the space of three days, the woolly-headed Cerberus at Becklands had nothing else to do but to open the door to visitors, and receive an avalanche of pasteboard into his black paws. The Hardings expanded into sudden popularity. Mr. Harding was so essentially the gentleman, Farnorth said; his daughter Zoé, was *such* a lovely charming child. Even Madame was per-

mitted to bask in this universal sunshine. The matrons and spinsters carefully drew out their French, that had been laid up for the last twenty years, and aired it for the benefit of this lady. What a cruel war they waged with these moods and tenses, these good people. How superbly unmindful were they of any concordance between nouns and adjectives. Bless them, how thoroughly British they were. Madame stared and shuddered slightly as the odd sentences fell on her ear, but she said "Oui, oui," to everything, and smiled and showed the even row of teeth which all Farnorth had pronounced false, but which all Farnorth was willing enough to accept as genuine now.

CHAPTER III.

I AM not one of those who entertain the opinion that beauty in women must of necessity vanish with their youth. In spite of Mr. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who has loaded our English matrons with such coarse abuse, I contend that some amongst them are quite as lovely as their daughters.

And why this preamble? Simply to herald this assertion:—I still consider Mary Snowe one of the loveliest women in Farnorth.

When first she came to our neighbourhood, and when she, her sister, and little Horace were shunned as lepers, my sailor brother, Fred, fell hopelessly and helplessly in love with her sweet face. There was not the shadow of a chance for him from the very first, as I plainly saw, but he would not see that. How abjectly he coaxed and conciliated her nephew. What showers of Noah's arks, balls, trumpets, and sweetmeats, he poured upon that very handsome young gentleman!

Mary Snowe did her best, in her gentle, womanly way, to ward off a climax, but Fred was too far gone for any thought of pride, or *amour propre*, and hope too afflicted him with mental cataract. He drifted into a proposal in no time. The inevitable answer was very kindly spoken, but it well nigh broke the poor lad's heart for all that, and Fred is a bachelor to this good day!

There was another inhabitant of Farnorth who succumbed to her many charms, but this was later, not in her pariah days. When the master of Gothic Hall became a widower, indeed immediately after he had placed that staring monument in our parish church, sacred to the memory of Jane, the beloved and deeply lamented wife of Giles Houndly, Esq., J.P., (second marriages are the natural sequence of these tablets in general); he also offered his hand and fortune, with what success you may easily imagine, to sweet Mary Snowe. He has made her the target for the worst of his venomous arrows ever since.

* * * *

It is a lovely day in summer, and the roses at the cottage are in full bloom. The maiden sisters are walking in their pretty garden. There is a great contrast between them, as much in appear-

ance as in character. Miss Alathea is several years older than her sister Mary. She is a tall dark woman, her face is thin and worn, her black hair flecked with white; she looks the age she honestly registered last census. She nibbles a good deal at the arts and sciences, but never gets a very plentiful meal therefrom. Farnorth pronounces her blue. She prides herself on the purity of her English, and rarely condescends to conventional colloquialism. Her phrases are rich with the eloquence of the penny-a-liner. She has latterly taken up geology, and carries a little hammer with her in her daily walks. She taps the blue limestone, and murmurs, "Decidedly fossiliferous formation," much to the awe of her admiring sister.

The classic regularity of Mary Snowe's features will make her a beauty to her dying day. Her eyes are of that deep violet-blue, against which time is powerless. There is a soft wintry bloom on her fair cheek. If a few silver threads mingle with the sheen of her abundant hair, the pale intruders scarcely dare show themselves in its golden wealth. She is of the middle height, and her feet and hands are fairy-like. In every word, in every movement, Nature has written "gentlewoman" in her strongest characters.

Miss Alathea holds a flower in her hand. She is imparting valuable information to her sister. She is deep in botanical classifications; suddenly she stops and looks at her watch.

"Did you not say, my dear Mary," she said, "that you proposed visiting that unfortunate John Dalton to-day? If so, I must advise you to expedite your movements. The dinner-hour is rapidly approaching, and you know I do not approve of your taking post-prandial exertion."

"I will go at once," replied Mary, perhaps not altogether unwilling to break up the floral lecture. "I am very sorry to hear poor John has met with this accident. He is a decent honest man enough, civil in his manners, too. Altogether different to his wife, for I must confess I stand in very considerable awe of Ann Dalton."

"Timidity is the one great defect in your organization, my dear Mary. It distresses me to see you so frequently overcome by this idiosyncrasy. Would you like *me* to accompany you on this mission of charity, my love?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Mary, rather hastily.

Miss Alathea was not by any means so popular amongst the poor people as her sister. They had a contempt for her fine phrases—pronounced

her to be "a sad flighty äde body," and were at no pains to conceal this opinion whenever they met her.

Mary opened John Dalton's cottage door timidly enough. Her first greeting was not calculated to reassure her. Ann Dalton, a very handsome black-eyed woman, knelt on the ground, and was busily engaged polishing the fire-irons—cleanliness was one of her virtues.

"You might ha' wiped yer feet afore you kom in, I think," she said. "I often wonder what sic fowk as ye were sent into t' warld for. Nobbut ut mak' a lot o' muck for poor bodies ut clean efter."

"I ought to have wiped my feet, Ann, certainly," said her visitor, mildly. "How is your husband to-day?"

"You may see for yoursel'," was the rough answer, as she pointed to a bed in the inner room where the invalid was lying.

He was of gigantic mould. His features heavy enough, but lighted up occasionally with a very pleasant smile. A mass of ore had fallen upon him and injured him a good deal. A less powerful man would have been killed by the accident.

"How are you, John?" said Mary.

"Middling, ma'am, thank you. Nobbut my chest is a bit bruised. T' doctor says I shall kom round gradely."

"Thou'll du na sic thing," said his amiable helpmate. "Thou's in a bad way, an' like enoo ut dee. Thou sud see t' parson again. It's time thou sud think o' sic like things, for mind, thou'll nit gang tramping through t' other spot as thou gangs tramping here, my lad. Na nice lile tit-bits for thee *thar*. Thou'll have to stand back an' tak' t' scraps."

Mary shuddered as she listened to words that seemed to her rank blasphemy, but which, nevertheless, were not intended for such. John appeared pretty well accustomed to this homely kind of religious instruction.

"I've takken tent o' sic like things mair than thou thinks on, my lass," he said; "and now gang on wi' thy cleaning, an' let Miss Mary read to me a lile bit."

He listened patiently enough, and made his own simple remarks, and drew comfort after his own quaint fashion from the consolatory words of the Good Book.

When the lecture was over, Mary once more

addressed Ann Dalton. "I am sorry to hear you have lost your mother since I saw you last," she said.

"Ay, she's gone, poor äde body. I laid her down coomfortable wi' hot beer an' good wheaten breead. T' coffin was nobbut plain dale; but it was sa weel steeaned, aw t' nebburs thowt it was oak, they did for sure-ly," and she smiled complacently as she thought of the grim deception.

[Well, perhaps we are none of us ill-pleased when our plain deal passes for oak.]

"Has Mr. Harding sent to enquire after your husband?" continued Mary. "He met with this accident at the Weasle Mine, did he not?"

"Ay, an' t' maister's sent mair than yance; an' what's better nor that, he's sent some brass; but he's gitten enoo to think on at yam poor chap, for he's like ut lose his bonny barn;" and a slight moisture dimmed for a moment the vixen's eyes.

"Indeed!" said Mary. "I am so very sorry to hear this. What is the matter with the child!"

"Scarlet fever. They've gitten Dr. Banques, but t' seems as t' maister doesn't reckon mich on him, an sä he's sent a man o' horseback reet away

across t' sands ut taligraph, I think they caw it, for a Lunnon doctor. The poor lile lass has gitten naibody about her but sarvant lasses, faffling offcomes that knä nowt; an' French Madam is like enoo ut pusson t' barn wi' paddocks an' snails, an' sic outlandish messments."

"It is very distressing," said Mary. "Do you know how long she has been ill?"

"A week, or happen mair. She tuk t' fever fra Dick Allonby's childer, as is aw laid up in it. Miss Zoey hard tell as they were badly, an' sä she cawed wi' some jellies an' oranges. French Madam must ha' been clean daft ut let t' barn gang in amang them. T' jabbering body's in a rare way now, an' no matter on her. Poor lile Zoey, she's just t' same age on our Polly;" and this time a very thick haze obscured the fierce dark eyes.

"Our Polly" was the only child of John and Ann Dalton. She was marvellously pretty, and occupied the one soft corner in her savage mother's heart. Both the parents were most ambitious for her, and denied themselves of many comforts in order that she might receive that "book larning" in which they felt themselves to be deficient. Proofs of her accomplishments already adorned

the cottage walls. A large sampler, framed and glazed, bearing a legend in bright scarlet characters, informing you that this was the work of Mary Dalton, aged eleven years, occupied a prominent position. I am afraid that these accomplishments, as also the advancement in "book larning," had not conduced to a proper observance of the fifth commandment; for the clever young person, aged eleven years, had been heard to declare that she "reckoned nowt o' fath-er and mother, for they dudn't knä waur t' Caspian Sea was!"

Mary quitted Ann Dalton's cottage with a heavy heart, and a much better opinion of that handsome virago than she had hitherto entertained.

The Misses Snowe had not joined in that rush to Becklands of which I have spoken in the last chapter. They knew nothing whatever of the master of that establishment; but an intimacy, dating from the merest accident, had sprung up between the gentle inmates of Rose Cottage and Zoé Harding. Madame had drawn up the pony-carriage more than once at the pretty rustic gate, and alighted there with her young pupil. The maiden ladies did not murder the French language after the manner of the matrons and spinsters of

Farnorth. They had lived abroad in their youth and were able to make themselves intelligible to the Parisian. Madame was very gracious to them both, but more especially to Mary, to whom she condescended to give valuable hints in the matter of toilette, &c., &c. Zoé had quite fascinated the sisters; there was a freshness and naïve grace about the child that was irresistible to the recluses. The thought that this bright being was ill, suffering, and in danger, was inexpressibly painful to Mary, and so paled her fair face as quite to shock her elder sister when she joined her at dinner.

Tears gathered in the eyes of the amiable blue-stocking when she heard of Zoé's dangerous illness.

"We will send and enquire at once," she said, "perhaps the reports are exaggerated."

"I do hope so," replied Mary, "she was so full of life and happiness only ten days ago. I never met so joyous a creature."

"So intelligent too," said Miss Alathea. "Do you remember, Mary, how attentively the dear child listened to the information I was fortunately able to give her on tertiary strata? and how delighted she was with that fine specimen of the

cornu ammonis which I showed her? The ammonite of St. Hilda is found in this district. This fossil lies in strata of limestone and clay, and in argillaceous iron ore," continued the learned lady, quoting at random from her last geological authority.

Now, if truth must be told, I believe that while Miss Alathea was dilating on strata and ammonites, Zoé was too much interested in watching the playful manœuvres of Mary's kitten to hear one single word either about tertiary formations or cornu ammonis. The fair lecturer was so pleasantly mounted on this her last scientific hobby as to be quite unaware of the sad fact.

"I don't know, my dear," added Miss Alathea, who had her foot well in the stirrup now, "whether I was sufficiently explicit in demonstrating the distinction between the ammonis obtusus and the ammonis varians. You will observe that, whereas——"

"You must excuse my interrupting you, dear Alathea," said Mary; "but at present I really cannot think of anything but this poor child."

"Of course I am quite as sorry as you can be," said the elder sister, rather tartly [it is not pleasant to be pulled to the ground when one

is fairly mounted]; "but after sending to make enquiries, I do not very well see what else we can do."

"I was thinking, dear," said gentle Mary, "whether it would be considered intrusive if I were to call at Becklands and offer to assist in nursing Zoé. Madame is very kind-hearted, I know, and very much attached to her pupil; but I cannot think she will be of much use in such a case, and you know when Horace——"

This was an unfortunate allusion, and induced a silence of some minutes on the part of both ladies. Miss Alathea was the first to speak.

"I do not know," she said, "whether it would be considered altogether decorous. You are a single woman, and Mr. Harding is a widower. We are alone and unprotected, and cannot therefore be too particular. Farnorth is so much given to gossip."

"I think my age and grey hairs are a sufficient protection against scandal," rejoined her sister.

"Grey hairs, indeed!" said Miss Alathea, rather indignantly adjusting her coiffure. [I don't think we, any of us, care to be considered too old for scandal.] "However, you know best, my dear,"

she continued. "I will leave you to act as your kind heart dictates; but if you do go, I advise you to walk very slowly, for, as I said before, I greatly disapprove of your taking post-prandial exertion."

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Harding was alone in his library. His face was haggard and worn, and his eyes heavy with watching. The London oracle had not as yet arrived, and Dr. Banques, a little piqued to think his skill was considered unequal to cope with the case, had quitted rather suddenly and indignantly half-an-hour ago, pleading an unavoidable engagement.

Zoé's young life hung on a thread.

When African Sam opened the door to Mary's timid summons, the circles round his eyes showed like red rings in his black face. There had not been a dry eye in Becklands for two days. Mary felt very nervous when she was ushered into the library, and there confronted its tall stately inmate. His stiff though courteous reception did not allay her tremor. "To what," he enquired, with a *réchauffé* of the manners of Le Grand Monarque, "was he indebted for the

honour of this visit? Perhaps Miss Snowe was not aware of the affliction that had befallen him. His daughter Zoé——" and here, thoughts of the danger in which this his only darling lay, for a moment choked his utterance.

His agitation enabled Mary to regain her composure, and she quietly explained to him the purport of her visit. The hard lines in his face relaxed, and his stateliness melted like snow in the sunshine, as the gentle speaker developed her kind intentions.

"I have had experience in more than one case similar to this," she said; "my nephew had the fever in its very worst form when he was a child. We were fortunate in securing the advice of the first physician in the kingdom. With the aid of God's mercy I believe it was Dr. ——'s judicious treatment that saved our boy's life. I can remember all his instructions to this day. If you will trust me I am persuaded I shall be able to do dear Zoé some good."

"You are, indeed, kind," said Mr. Harding. "I have telegraphed for Dr. Halley, and am in hourly expectation of his coming. You will think me prejudiced, I dare say, but as I have little faith in country practitioners I distrusted Dr.

Banques, and I fear I have given the good man considerable offence. I will prove my confidence in you, Miss Snowe," he added, "by asking you at once to come with me to the sick-room."

Zoé was tossing restlessly on her bed. Her pretty face was all red and disfigured. Poor Madame, looking ten years older from her utter neglect of toilette, knelt at the bedside of her pupil, and entreated her *mignonne*, her *chou*, her *petite chatte* to sleep, in hysterical tones that would have kept awake the seven sleepers.

There was a sudden light in the poor fevered eyes of the little girl as they fell upon Mary's fair face. Madame saw that momentary sunshine, and a jealous gleam came into her black orbs, which augured badly for the visitor's welcome.

"What does Mees Snowe want here?" she asked, and something very like "*impertinence*" hissed through her closed teeth.

A few polite words from the master of the house checked the coming storm. Mary had for the first time an opportunity of admiring that polished charm of manner, which subsequently made Mr. Harding the most popular man in Farnorth. "Madame stood in need of rest," he said; "her attention to his child had been most

unwearied. He must insist on her taking some repose. She must relinquish her post to Miss Snowe, who had kindly undertaken to relieve her," and Monsieur bowed conciliated Madame out of the room.

Mary took her place at the bedside. Her first care was speedily to remove half a ton of blankets which Madame had piled upon her patient. Zoé's plaintive demands for water were now no longer met with tender denial. She was permitted to drink the draught for which she craved. The new nurse then poured some drops of her infallible remedy into a cup, and gave the medicine to the little sufferer, who, too ill to speak, smiled, and swallowed the mixture in simple faith.

Soon the anxious watcher saw a slight moisture spread its healing over the fevered skin, and presently a gentle sleep fell on the weary eyelids.

* * * *

Dr. Banques was not very long in recovering from his attack of pique. After all, it was rather a fine thing you know to hold a consultation with a famous London practitioner; and the worthy fellow took the opportunity of alluding to it at every house he visited that day. "I am obliged to hurry away," he said to each of his patients

in turn, "I have an important case to attend in conjunction with the celebrated Dr. Halley, of whom you may perhaps have heard."

Odd enough, the London oracle was just alighting at the entrance gate to Becklands as Dr. Banques's one-horse brougham drew up there.

The two gentlemen quickly fraternised, and walked up the avenue together.

A travelling carriage passed them, it was coming very rapidly from the house. A bewhiskered foreign-looking man leant for a moment from the window to give some instruction to the driver.

"Good heavens!" suddenly exclaimed the London doctor, and, without uttering another word, he broke away from his companion, and commenced running after the retreating carriage. His chase was not attended with success. In a few moments he had rejoined Dr. Banques, his respiration considerably increased by the unwonted exertion.

"Have I rightly understood the telegram?" he gasped; "am I summoned to attend a case of scarlet fever?"

"Most certainly," replied Dr. Banques, "an undoubted case of rosalia. This is the seventh

day since the patient's seizure, and I this morning observed symptoms of cuticular exfoliations. I never saw a clearer case of rosalia" (the honest man would not have said scarlet fever for the world).

"Ah, yes, indeed!" said the Londoner, who was evidently quite *distrait*. "Do you know that gentleman who passed us so rapidly just now, sir?" he enquired suddenly.

"Not in the least," replied the country Galen.

It was clear that the London doctor thought he himself did. He began an animated conversation on the subject, which was at its height when the two medicos had reached the hall-door of Becklands.

Mr. Harding was standing there, and came eagerly forward.

"Dr. Halley, I presume; you are indeed welcome. Dr. Banques, I am delighted to have secured your valuable assistance as well. I am glad to say I can give you a better account of your patient. There appears to me a decided improvement within the last few hours."

"Very happy to hear of it, I am sure," said Dr. Halley. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Harding, I have been quite startled by the sight of an old familiar face—at the last place in the world too

I should have expected to see it. I was just telling our friend here I passed my noviciate at Paris, and it was there I first made the acquaintance of Denassie. I have not seen him for years until to-day."

The polite master of Becklands bowed, and evidently waited for further information.

"When I saw him just now, I did my best to overtake him, but——"

"Really I do not know to whom you allude," interrupted Mr. Harding, with a smile.

"Why, to the gentleman who passed us so quickly in a travelling carriage, only a few moments ago," replied the doctor.

"Oh, *that* gentleman," said Mr. Harding, "that is Monsieur Ferné, a French *négociant*, who is connected with the iron trade. He wishes me to enter into a contract to—but really, gentlemen, such business details cannot possibly interest you. We will, if you please, lose no time in visiting my daughter," and he marshalled them up the handsome staircase.

"I never saw such an extraordinary resemblance," puffed out Dr. Halley, as he toiled hastily after his host. "I could have sworn it was Denassie, and he had no common face either."

Zoé had awakened from that sleep which had fallen on the fever, like dew on the parched earth. Her breathing was quiet and regular. The life current no longer surged in her veins. When Dr. Halley took her little hand in his, and pressed his fingers on her pulse, he nodded assurance to the anxious father that all danger was now over.

"Your daughter has been most judiciously treated," he said, "she will be well in a few days."

Mary Snowe had glided noiselessly from the room when the two doctors entered.

"The very prescription I was about to write," continued Dr. Halley, as his nose rested for a moment on the bottle the last nurse had left on the table. "And I see, sir," he said, addressing Dr. Banques, "you have ordered port wine. Really, Mr. Harding, I am of no use here, your daughter could not be in better hands."

Dr. Banques was staring very much as the clown does in a pantomime, when harlequin's wand has effected some sudden changes.

Port wine! He would just as soon have thought of ordering his patient poison. And then this bottle—the contents of which were so highly approved of by the London authority. Had it

dropped from the clouds? Was he, James Banques, F.R.C.S., awake or dreaming?

He looked at Mr. Harding, but that gentleman was bowing and smiling a courteous acquiescence to the London oracle's decision.

"If the cap fits, wear it," saith the proverb, and when a wreath of laurel is thrust upon your temples, are you bound to remove it?

Dr. Banques blushingly consented, like a wise man, to the halo round his bald crown.

[Mr. Giles Houndly was very garrulous on the subject of Mary's visit to Becklands. "A deep dodge of that old maid. A very artful dodge, sir," he said; "but Harding is a great deal too old a bird to be caught with such chaff as that. Ahem! Harding is up to a thing or two. He was not born to-day. There is something uncommonly mysterious about him, but he is wide awake, and no mistake. That little game of Miss Mary's won't do, sir. Mark my words, it won't pay at any price."

* * * *

A few weeks, and Zoé was once more bright and blooming as ever. If her visits to Rose Cottage had been tolerably frequent before her illness, they were trebled now. In order to be near her dear, pretty Miss Mary, she submitted patiently

to the geological lecture daily given by Miss Alathea; and what was more, she even listened silently to a plentiful sprinkling of unpleasant home truths, administered likewise by that lady, who was a believing disciple of the creed which teaches that bitters are at all times a wholesome accompaniment to the sweets with which the cup of life is so full to overflowing. "Le plus grand effort de l'amitié," writes La Rochefoucauld, "n'est pas de montrer nos défauts à notre ami, c'est de lui faire voir les siens."

I think many of our friends are kind enough to make some such efforts for us wayfarers as we toil along the *grande route.*

Plunge into a bath of golden rules and maxims, and some of the precious dust must perforce adhere, just as the robbers' guineas stuck to Cassam Baba's quart pot. Zoé, no doubt, greatly benefited by the occasional immersion in admirable advice and counsel, to which she was submitted by her self-constituted mentor after she had dutifully swallowed the dose of bitters I have mentioned.

At her own home the little maid was allowed to grow into womanhood very much as Nature willed. In her father's eyes the child was faultless. I am

afraid Madame took more pains to impart a good accent than to instil good principles. She was much more intent on forming her pupil's figure than her character. "La petite aura une taille cambrée et vraiment charmante," she said, "ce serait véritablement une honte de lui faire mettre des corsets." And the good lady seemed to think it would be "véritablement une honte" also to put any stay on *la petite's* actions. And so very little effort was made to bend this young twig in the way it should go—how would the tree incline? Who knows? Perhaps all the straighter for this lack of training. We do our best with our pruning knife—we train up here—we cut down there. God help us! How many healthy branches, how many tender shoots do we lop off in the process.

"If," as Miss Alathea said [the geologist drew all her metaphors from her last bantling] "the rich ore of Zoé's nature was crossed with veins of baser clay, the metal itself was genuine, and there was no conventional deposit on it." She was passionate and self-willed, this little Spanish girl, but false seeming was unknown to her. She was proud and rather haughty, but no reptile jealousies and envyings—no crawling spites, so deprecated

by Mr. Sala—left their slimy trail on any of her words or actions.

I have said that doubtless Zoé greatly benefited by the *bas bleu's* teaching; but I am inclined to think that Mary's practice effected more than Alathea's precept. Christian charity, which flings its mantle over human failing, and is the last to cast the stone—loving tender sympathy given alike to sinner and to saint—a total abnegation of self—the soft answer which turns away wrath; these are the flowers that perfume Mary Snowe. Who could breath an atmosphere so pure, and not gain moral strength?

The master of Becklands (he was no longer a tenant, but the proprietor of that desirable mansion, which he had purchased, Farnorth declared, with six months' profit from his mine) greatly approved of his daughter's intimacy with the spinster sisters. His gratitude to Mary was very great, and would have found a vent in princely gifts, but she would accept of nothing.

The Weasle was grown to a leviathan size now; "a mere torso as yet" its owner said, "the limbs would come in time." But the torso performed wonders, if money-making be a marvel. The modest establishment at Becklands was doubled—

Plush and Powder condescendingly took the pasteboards from admiring morning callers. When Zoé was at home during the holidays—Madame took her to school and remained with her the whole time—it was no longer the quiet pony-carriage which passed you in the long avenue. Prancing horses splashed you with mud, and Madame's toilette and Zoé's pretty face showed to advantage in a barouche, the like of which had not been seen since the palmy days when the Plantagenets reigned absolute monarchs of Farnorth.

And what dinners Mr. Harding gave! No grim Barmecidal feasts such as were annually held at the houses of the county families, where, like the repast of Longfellow's Hidalgo, there was so much more table-cloth than meat. At Becklands the snowy damask (dinners *à la Russe* were unknown then) was nearly hidden with its wealth of costly dainties. Salmon at half-a-guinea a pound—peas, when each green globule must have cost a shilling—pine apples, thirty shillings apiece—Moet and Cliquot flowing like water. Farnorth was stricken dumb, but drank and devoured none the less for that. The county cedars waved their scanty branches in haughty envious astonishment at all this mushroom magnificence.

Mr. Harding took a great deal of trouble about that French contract of which he had spoken. He crossed the channel several times. "The guv'ner," said the head clerk and captain of the mine, who was a Cornish man, "always goes himself to treat with these frog-eating mossoos, but hang them, next to nothing ever comes of it." Monsieur Ferné was evidently a difficult man to deal with; for though it was more than three years now since his travelling carriage stopped at Becklands, he had purchased very little ore yet.

Zoé hated to hear of these journeys—"You don't recover from those nasty Straits of Dover for a month, papa," she said. "I thought you were such a good sailor. Why will you go to France?"

"I must extend my connection," replied her father; "it will be all the better for you, Pussy."

Mr. Giles Houndly was quite prostrate now before the Farnorth Crœsus. The dinners at Becklands had overcome this worthy gentleman, and he toadied the giver of them no little. "We must have you on the bench, sir; the mining interest is not properly represented. Such men as you are a real boon to the country; and your

LIBRARY

daughter, sir, is an ornament to our town. Don't talk to me about ancient blood and good old county families. What have the Plantagenets done for us? A stuck-up proud lot, sir, up to their ears in debt, and as poor as church mice." [If you only knew how he had kotowed before these potentates!] "What *we* want, sir, are working men. Turn out the drones, say I. Give me the man who can not only make money, but has the spirit to spend it judiciously, too." And the speaker selected some choice green morsels of turtle, and provided for them comfortably. Still, in spite of all these fine words, I have very indifferently represented the character of the owner of Gothic Hall, if you for one moment imagine he spoke in equally flattering terms *of* his host as he did *to* him. The fumes of Cliquot and Moet had scarcely passed away—the salmon and peas were barely digested—when our amiable friend was clearing his throat and protesting to his Farnorth neighbours that—

"This man's a *parvenu*, sir." [Who was *your* grandfather, Giles?] "You don't see such vulgar ostentation amongst the really good families. The Plantagenets—and no one can deny *their* blood—were content to eat their salmon and

cucumber at a Christian price. This man's silver is all new, any one can see that. The dishes are handled with his crest. *His* crest, forsooth! He will be buying some ancestors next. Mark my words, sir, we shall see some of the Harding family, in long waists and periwigs, adorning the walls at Becklands. You can pick them up for next to nothing in Monmouth Street."

It was not only the *élite* of Farnorth who profited by this Danae of the Weasle. Golden drops fell in amongst the cottages, and were greedily picked up by the inmates. Mr. Harding's name headed every subscription. The 'Farnorth Advertiser' and the 'District Reflector' had weekly to chronicle some act of munificence. Scylla and Charybdis took up their pens again on this subject, and shed their ink like Britons. The fame of the master of Becklands extended far and wide, and at length some more than ordinary act of liberality found its way into one of the London papers.

"Ahem! they say he put it in himself, sir!" quoth Giles Houndly.

CHAPTER V.

It is the middle of November, and the modern Babylon wears that thick unbecoming veil which it frequently adopts in that month. Something not unlike vaporised pea-soup eclipses the brightness of the shop windows. It is midday, but all the lamps in the streets are lit, and shine very pale stars in the universal gloom. Carriages rattle along the slippery pavement, each individual vehicle being as the car of Juggernaut to timid provincials who venture on the crossings. Link-boys and sweepers drive a brisk trade, and hold their feast of coppers.

In one of the streets leading from that quarter of the town which is tolerably fashionable now, but which was infinitely more so some years ago, there are several houses wherein you may obtain furnished apartments, if you like to pay pretty well for them. The rents of these houses are high, but the rooms are low—they are furnished

in an imposing manner. There is plenty of glass and ormolu—also, there is a rich accumulation of dust and dirt. The owners of these establishments live in the simple faith of their forefathers. Mahogany four-posted bedsteads, with their heavy draperies, take up the greater part of the sleeping chambers. Your rest in these sepulchral domitories is not the balmy sleep of childhood; but your landlady will utterly ignore those abnormal bumps on your face and hands which you dismally exhibit to her notice. Nay, if even your nocturnal hunt be successful, and you triumphantly show her the proofs of your prowess, she will blandly assure you that nothing of the kind exists in her apartments, and that *they* must have come in your luggage.

The drawing-room floor of one of these houses was, on this November day, tenanted by three individuals, two ladies and a gentleman. *Place aux dames.* The elder lady, a faded blonde with insipid features, has a querulous aspect. She is complaining bitterly of London bread, London butter, London milk, London everything. Her washed-out blue eyes appeal constantly for sympathy; they are watery as the London milk, as she expatiates on the evils of her position. Her

two companions pay very little attention to her plaintive wailing. The younger lady, who is her daughter, is deep in the pages of a French novel. She does not resemble her mother, saving in this, that she is also fair. She is in the bloom of womanhood, and beautiful as a houri. The lord and master of these two women is a middle-aged man, short and spare; his good looks are in the preterite. Time, that best of all depilatories, has bared his temples; he has the coiffure of Mephistopheles. His eyes are deep set, his under lip protrudes, the upper one is garnished with a thick moustache, dyed purple-black. What is his name? Algernon Charles Silvester.

He is the cadet of a very high and mighty family, which has a peer of the realm for its head. This head and all its inferior members spoke loudly in praise of Algy's cleverness, when that accomplished gentleman made his fortunate matrimonial *coup*—a hundred thousand pounds, and no settlements! "Algy was always such a sharp, clever dog;" but when the "sharp, clever dog" contrived in a very few years to make ducks and drakes of his unfettered plum, his reputation for ability vanished with his guineas.

There are more unpleasant cold shoulders in

the world than those of mutton, and this Algernon Charles very quickly discovered. He was not easily shaken off. He clung to his aristocratic connections like grim death for some time, and acquired during that period a facility in letter writing which astonished himself. Epistles with begging propensities are rarely acknowledged. Algernon wearied in due course of this one-sided correspondence, and the peer of the realm and the lesser magnates were no longer scared by a sight of "that confounded Algy's handwriting."

When first Algernon's ship went down, flotsam and jetsam drifted to him in the shape of directorships to moribund companies; but these waifs and strays gradually disappeared, and for years now Algy has lived on his wits, and supported his wife and his daughter thereon. This scion of a noble house is on intimate terms with every leg in the racing calendar. His best pasturage has been derived from the turf. It was that lucky pot on the Goodwood which has enabled him to bring his family to town this dismal season.

"We shall have this wretched fog all through November, I suppose," moaned the elder lady. "I can scarcely see across the table, although the

gas is lighted. I never slept all night, and I don't believe these are heat-bumps on my neck, whatever the landlady may say. What a miserable breakfast I have had, nothing but bacon and this bread, which I dare say is half plaster-of-Paris. And they call this stuff cream! I know the Londoners mix horses' brains with their milk. Oh dear, it makes me quite sick to think——"

"Drop it, Maria," cried her husband. "'Gad, we have had enough of your whining for once. Clarry, where is the newspaper?"

The beauty lazily lifted her eyes from her book.

"Close to your elbow," she said, and resumed her reading.

There was a silence for some minutes.

"Hallo!" suddenly exclaimed the gentleman. "Here *is* a go. Maria, have you heard anything lately of that precious brother of yours, who eloped with the barmaid from Cambridge thirty years ago?"

"You know very well I have not," said the lady testily. "When poor pa ——"

"Hang it, say father, and don't bleat out pa, pa, like an elderly sheep with a cold in it's head."

"I always said papa, and I always *will* say papa," said his wife; "however, I can hold my tongue."

"Threatened with a fit of the stubborns, eh? The complaint would be inconvenient to me, madam, just at present, so I must trouble you, if you please, to postpone it until you have given me all the information I require. Was not your brother christened Theodore Baynes?" And there was that in the speaker's eye which compelled an answer.

"Of course he was," replied his helpmate sulkily, "he was called after my maternal grandfather, Sir Theodore Baynes. When my brother disgraced the family by making that low marriage, grandpapa altered his will and left his money to an idiot asylum. I'm sure I don't know why he didn't leave it to me; it was very hard only to git the diamonds."

"Which I deposited with an accommodating relative shortly after we twain became one flesh," interposed her husband. "Never mind about the diamonds, Maria, at present, but tell me what became of your brother after his marriage."

"I have told you over and over again that he got his living by teaching," said Mrs. Silvester

impatiently. "Pa would not give him a farthing, and how he contrived to exist I'm sure I don't know; with his horrid vulgar wife too, whose temper was awful; and who would have sold the very clothes off her back for gin."

"It must have been a pleasant *ménage;* poor devil!" said Algy.

"He brought it all on himself. And yet when pa died and left me all his money, people said it was a very hard case for Theodore. I'm sure it wasn't my fault. I always did my dooty to poor pa. *I* didn't disgrace the family. It was only fair I should git the money, but after all—"

"It did no good, for you married me; and I scattered all your shiners, and you and your only child are paupers. By Jove! *that* has been your matins and vespers for the last twenty years. I have the song off by heart. Please to forget your grievances, and tell me if you ever saw or heard anything about your brother after your father's death."

"He wrote to me once to tell me his horrid wife was dead. It is years and years ago now. I dare say he expected me to answer his letter, for he said he was about to start for South America; which of course meant 'Send me some money'—

but I didn't. Poor papa made me promise to have nothing to do with him; and no one can say I did not always do my dooty."

"More especially when your *dooty* went hand-in-hand with your inclination," said her husband. "'Gad Maria, you are a selfish party. It might perhaps be better for you now if you had not been quite so *doo*tiful. Read that;" and he pointed to a paragraph in the paper he held in his hand.

"It is again our pleasing duty to record another munificent act of the Midas (if we may be permitted so to call him) of this district. Our readers will perceive that the subscription list to our new Town Hall is headed by the princely donation of five hundred pounds from Theodore Baynes Harding, Esq."—*Farnorth Advertiser.*

"It must be him," said Madam, who was not on the best terms with Lindley Murray. "Only fancy; and I have given him up for dead, years ago. Where on earth has he got his money? It is very hard for poor me," she whimpered, "to think that he who disgraced the family should be rolling in wealth, and I, who always did my dooty and never gave papa a wrong word in my life—" and a deluge of tears followed.

Mrs. Silvester, like a great many other good

people in this world, waxed lachrymose whenever she referred to her own goodness.

"Oh," groaned the owner of this Niobe, "I thought you a precious dear bargain, Maria, when you had your hundred thousand pounds—what you are now!—Leave the room madam. Confound it, I cannot stand that snivelling. Come, tramp at once."

"Your mother grows more tiresome every day," he said to his daughter, when he had closed the door on his weeping wife.

The beautiful girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Cannot you tell me something new, if only by way of a change, papa?" she said.

"Well, what do you think of this rich uncle of yours who has suddenly come to light?"

"That he will prove very much like the rest of my rich uncles—by no means disposed to nepotism, if that big word includes nieces as well as nephews in its signification."

"Confound the whole crew," said her father savagely, "they ought to be proud of such a beautiful niece, for you are beautiful, Clarry, and no mistake."

"And much good has my beauty done me so far. I have been six years now in the matrimonial

market. I have been trotted out like a horse at a fair; and with what result? Mamma had ten offers before she was my age. She had a hundred thousand charms far more powerful than mine."

"You might have married well, over and over again, if you had followed my advice."

"I followed your advice when I accepted that wretched young idiot, Sir Marmaduke Marmaduke," she said. "I need scarcely remind you what a miserable fiasco *that* was."

"You might have netted one or two thousand pounds out of that affair if you would have been guided by me."

"Thank you, I am not overdone with womanly delicacy and all that humbug, but I had an objection, I must confess, to figuring as the plaintiff in a breach of promise of marriage case. Moreover the thing would not have paid. Fancy the delight of the defendant's counsel when he swooped upon the fact that I was one year the senior of his client. What a magnificent opportunity for forensic eloquence—confiding youthful simplicity, and this designing female, my lud! Two thousand pounds! Pshaw! a discerning British jury would have barely awarded one farthing damages for my injured feelings."

"I am sure the number of letters you had," said her father—

"Bah! *ne m'en parlez plus.* Let us change the subject. You are thinking of writing to this resuscitated brother-in-law of yours."

"Most decidedly I am. I flatter myself I can write as good a letter as most men," he added complacently.

"Unanswered letters are not cheering things, as you have had occasion to know. If you will take my advice you will not write to this man."

"Why not?"

"Because by doing so you make your motives too transparent. He will conclude at once that you have seen his name in the paper in connection with this princely donation, and he will draw his own inferences with regard to your disinterestedness."

"By the Lord Harry you are right," said her father. "What a clever head you have, Clarry; but something must be done, my child. I cannot afford to let any opportunity slip, for in spite of that lucky pot on the Goodwood, there's not too much shot in the locker, I can tell you."

"I advise you to wait for a month or two, and then put an advertisement in the 'Times.'"

"Light dawns—I begin to twig. Proceed Mademoiselle Talleyrand."

"I should word it ambiguously—stay—let me see." She smiled, took a pen from the table, and wrote rapidly—

"To Theodore Baynes Harding, who left England five and twenty years ago:—A dying sister longs for the forgiveness of an injured brother."

"I think that will do," she said, as she handed what she had written to her father. "You can give your address—Post-office, Vere Street. It will not do to be too explicit at first. Mamma always fancies herself to be dying, so she would act the *rôle* to perfection."

"Admirable," cried her father, in an ecstasy. "Clarry, you deserve to be made empress of all the Russias. Everything shall be done according to your directions, and between us we may make something out of this affair. Your mother is not altogether a Minerva, but she knows pretty well on which side her bread is buttered. I think I can make her play her part when the proper time comes. And now I must be off to Tattersall's. Can I do anything for you before I go?"

"Nothing," she said, "only let me finish Monte Christo in peace."

When her father had quitted the room, the whole expression of the girl's face changed. The mocking satirical smile faded away, and was replaced by a weary dejected look. She slightly shuddered, as she murmured, "Faugh! what a wretched mountebank life it is."

She gazed from the yellow-tinted window into the yellow-tinted street. There was no anodyne for a fit of spleen in that dismal scene. She threw herself once more on the sofa, and tried to resume her reading, but the pages had now no power to absorb her attention. She flung the book impatiently aside, and sat thinking.

While she is thus quiet, I will sketch her portrait for you.

She is, as I have said, most beautiful. Tall, and finely formed, not an angle offends the eye. Her features are purely Grecian in their classic outline. Her eyes are magnificent even in repose. She has that wonderful hair so rarely seen, of the tint called by the French, "blonde cendrée." It is drawn away in rippling waves from off her oval cheek, where the rose has only faintly breathed, and gathered in a glorious coil around her small head. Her hands are white and delicately shaped, and her whole appearance indicates an idle an-

cestry, for so I choose to paraphrase what the world calls "breed and pure blood."

Her beauty has not, to-day at least, the aid of dress; the gown of black silk she wears is in its *seconde jeunesse.*

People can array themselves very charmingly on credit, as some of our confiding modistes have occasion to know; but to obtain credit, ready money is in the first place necessary. A want of ready money is the great disease of the Silvester family. It was perfectly marvellous how well they employed the little they had. A few pounds paid in advance, combined with the halo of aristocratic connections, had secured to Clara Silvester a first-class education. It is true she had been a pupil in many establishments; true also that the Lady Superiors of these seminaries indulge to this good day in bitter vituperations against the cadet of a noble family. "Ce fripon de Silvestre m'a affreusement volé," shrieks Madame la Directrice of the Pensionnat in the Champs Elysées; "c'était un joli échantillon du gentilhomme anglais!" "For two years, my dear," says the mistress of Minerva House, "for two years did Miss Silvester remain with me; she had lessons from the first masters, and after the quarter paid in advance,

not one penny did I ever receive," wails the poor lady. "'Gad," cries clever Algy, "there is not a duchess in the land better educated than my handsome Clarry, and she got her accomplishments for next to nothing." Which she most assuredly did.

And yet Algernon Silvester had never been placarded in sporting circles as a defaulter.

"I am not guilty of that count in the indictment," said a murderer and burglar, who was hanged at Newgate in the good old days, "I did not steal the extinguisher. It is true I brained the old man as he was lying in bed; it is true I killed the woman, and took away her savings, but I did not steal the extinguisher—I die without that sin on my soul."

Algy had led a wicked godless life. He had rapidly run through his wife's fortune, and though that good lady makes the most of her grievance, I admit she has reason to complain. He had systematically swindled hard working, helpless women; he had been whitewashed time out of mind, and so defrauded honest tradespeople; and yet, this heartless Pagan has also his sense of honour. The light is faint as the glimmer over fœtid marshes, but it is visible enough to be recognised. His name is good in the betting-ring.

"Algy is corn to the belt," his knavish comrades say, "he never skulks on settling-day.

He did not steal the extinguisher.

* * * *

Great confidence exists, as we have seen, between Algy and his handsome daughter. He is very fond of her, and most devoutly admires her, but he does not altogether understand her—who does understand Clara Silvester? Beautiful, heartless, clever, unprincipled, she is an enigma to all who approach her. Mrs. Silvester, poor weak selfish woman, regards her daughter something after the fashion that a domestic hen, which has hatched an eaglet in her nest, may be supposed to look upon the daring flights of her nestling. Clara's stately manner, and her bitter scoffing words, silence Algy's wife far more effectually than her husband's coarse abuse; but there is very little love between the mother and her child. The beautiful girl is young in years, but oh! how old she is in feeling. Has the swindling vagabond life, to which she has been linked from her infancy, crushed the youth out of her? I do not know—I know she loathes her wretched position; I know it has bred in her heart one master passion—a fierce, longing thirst for gold. What

companionship has she known since she left that cheated dupe, her last school mistress? Clever, lovely, accomplished, well born, the door of good society has yet been closed against the gambling bankrupt's daughter. Gentlemen jockeys, elderly *roués*, and titled young spendthrifts, have fluttered round Algy's handsome girl. One or two have been violently smitten with her wonderful beauty, but a run of ill luck on the green cloth, or the capsizing of a heavy pot on the Derby, have faded the budding orange blossom, and left the haughty girl to wear the willow as best she could. On such occasions, Algy has talked fiercely of pistols and lawyers, but his daughter's wisdom has stayed his hand. Notoriety of that kind was death to her future prospects, and she knew it.

After the exit of her lord, Mrs. Silvester joins her daughter in the drawing-room, and once more bleats out her woes.

"How dirty everything is," she whimpers, "and your father is such a brute. I don't think there is a more miserable woman than me in the world. After all the money I brought him, to be put in a wretched hole like this, and there's Theodore—I declare it has quite put me out to think that he's so rich, and I——"

Her daughter rises suddenly—

"I am going out," she says. "Do you want anything?"

"You're not surely going out a day like this," cries her mother, "so wet and foggy; I won't stir, and it isn't proper for you to walk out alone!"

"It is rather late in the day to prate about propriety to me," says her daughter coldly.

"Of course, nothing I say will be attended to. It would have been very different if I had had my money. You are almost as bad as your father, Clara, and such a mother as I have been. I'm sure when you had the measles I—" and once more the recollection of her own goodness quite overpowered the speaker.

Clara left the room during the shower.

CHAPTER VI.

The large servants' hall at Becklands is in gala dress. The walls are all adorned with evergreens and hot-house flowers. Powder and plush have been compelled to eat their mutton and capers in the kitchen, grumbling no little thereat. Zoé Harding is very busy; she has to entertain more than a hundred small children of every age, from three to ten, and carefully watch lest they surfeit themselves, and bring on bilious fevers, with currant buns and coffee. The little guests arrive early—their faces shine with unwonted soap and friction with coarse towels—they are neatly dressed. Zoé has had some difficulty to preserve a strict democracy at these, her annual feasts. The slightest superiority in dress leads to cliques and aristocratic exclusiveness. White pinafores ostracise blue; merino frocks haughtily hold themselves aloof from contact with cotton. This evening all the visitors wear dresses and pinafores

provided by the young mistress of Becklands. Zoé has not ventured to repeat that dangerous experiment of hers last year, when she included the children from the workhouse in her invitations. The poor grey-garbed innocents were sent to Coventry; the mothers of the other children were loudly indignant; they vowed with a great many strong parts of speech, that their barns "sudn't gang any mair to Miss Zoé's feasts, nobbut ut meet a lot o' workus brats." The Pariahs will have an entertainment all to themselves this year.

The young hostess is rather flushed. She is very pretty. She has not grown much since we saw her last. Zoé is altogether *mignonne*. The rich silk dress she wears sits closely to her figure ("si charmante et cambrée," as Madame prophesied it would be); its colour is most becoming to her dark beauty. Her tiny hands gleam with rings; a costly brooch confines her lace collar; an admirable artiste has arranged her hair; she looks the child of luxury.

Madame is busy with the cups and saucers. The good lady has very much expanded lately. "Il faut que je me serre un peu," she sighs, "à présent je suis trop forte et ça m'agace, voyez-

vous." She can speak English pretty well now, indeed, she pronounces herself "parfaitement Anglaise" in everything. The matrons and spinsters have laid aside their French again—they no longer air it in the presence of Madame.

Patrician Powder and Plush—indignation even in their calves—bear in the viands, and haughtily wait on the plebeians. Gentle Mary Snowe, fair as ever, leans over a sickly little guest, and ministers to her tenderly.

Flitting about the room you may observe another figure. This visitor has been invited to assist in serving out the buns and coffee. She is a Sunday school teacher. It is "our Polly," who is a woman now, and a very lovely one. It is not only a mother's partiality which proclaims her "fair as alabaster, and t' bonniest lass in t' country side." Farnorth has christened her its "Snowdrop." Zoé Harding is very kind to her, and takes more notice of her than Madame altogether approves. Ann Dalton's daughter is no favourite with the Parisian. She admits the Snowdrop's beauty—"et pour de l'esprit elle n'en manque pas," she says; but she is not "d'un bon naturel," the sapient lady decides; and between you and me I do not think she is very far wrong.

"Our Polly" is in her element now. She is mingling almost on equal terms with the "quality." To be a lady is her ambition. The old feeling which made her as a child declare "she reckoned nowt o' fath-er and mother, for they dudn't knä war t' Caspian Sea was," has grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength. She chafes in her rustic bondage, and is oppressed by her social status. She shudders as she listens to the broad patois of her parents. Alas! unhappy father and mother, have you denied yourselves of comforts for this? They gaze with a sort of admiring awe on this their child. She is apart from them; a superior being, moulded of material altogether different to their common clay. Ann Dalton strives to weed the coarse words from her dialect and "nacks," as the country people call it, when she talks to her daughter. John and she have decided "our Polly" is not fit for "sarvice." They have apprenticed her to a dress-maker, and the girl has already so far profited by her instruction as to be able to model her own dresses in the newest fashion. She has lovers by the dozen, but is coldly cruel alike to all. Fifty valentines found their way last February to the Snowdrop of Farnorth. The rustic belles in

the neighbourhood hate her with a savage hatred —their rosy faces deepen to an unbecoming tint as they wonder what all the lads can see to admire in Mary Dalton. "She is as white as a clout," these indignant fair ones say.

The revels are at the highest. Two local fiddlers are scraping shrill shrieks from their tortured instruments; the children's wooden clogs are clattering on the floor—they are dancing after a fashion of their own. The master of Becklands enters. He has aged a good deal in these few years, white threads glisten in his black hair; the Midas of the district has a worn and anxious look. He is a Justice of the Peace now, and chairman of the Poor Law Board. If Farnorth were a borough town he would be unanimously returned its member; never was an "offcome" so popular before. The railroad has by this time stretched its iron feelers into the hills and dales; that "Torso" the Weasle has its limbs now. Trade is brisk; the quantity of ore raised is more startling than ever. "Two hundred thousand tons, sir," says Giles Houndly to an iron-ore master, whose mine is in a sad condition, "two hundred thousand tons sent from the Weasle this year; I know it for a fact. At present prices,

the profit on each ton cannot be less than, say, three shillings. I tell you what, sir, Harding must have netted thirty thousand pounds this last twelvemonth. That's the way to work a mine. I hear the water has drowned you out in all your shafts. Ahem! they say no one understands mining in these parts but Harding. What do you think, sir?"

I have said the master of Becklands is very popular in Farnorth. He was infinitely more so among the fairer portion of the neighbourhood a little time ago. Elderly, middle-aged, and youthful spinsters had directed the whole artillery of their charms against this impregnable citadel. A discerning observer in our parish church must have noticed—if he ever permitted his eyes to wander from his Prayer-book—a decided change for the better in the toilettes of the lovelier portion of the congregation. Miss Benton nearly made her fortune at this period; certainly it was the foundation of what ultimately led to her genteel retirement from business. Bonnets were ordered with a disregard to cost, amounting to recklessness. Mrs. Bland, the widow lady with the pretty unmarried daughters, could not balance her accounts satisfactorily for months. She was

a whole year behind hand by that brilliant party she gave last Christmas; and after all, nothing came of it, as the poor relict said. A coldness arose between those bosom friends, Hermia and Helena, all on account of the master of Becklands. He was most courteous to all the fair besiegers, but he showed preference to none. "His manners are charming, but he has no heart," was the universal moan. The elderly spinsters, who so often had said dear Zoé was far too young and lovely to conduct such an establishment, suddenly decided, when all their blandishments proved futile, that really, you know, proper chaperonage appeared no longer necessary for young ladies now-a-days—they were so very pert and forward. The more youthful attackers, who pronounced Zoé Harding "sweetly pretty" when the siege was at its height, utterly ignore her good looks now. "Fine feathers make fine birds; but she is so very sallow and foreign-looking," they say. Some of the discomfited beauties—ancient vestals, who religiously kept the sacred fire of scandal burning —tried to make fuel out of Madame, but, somehow or other, they could not make it kindle. The Parisian's appearance, so stout and respectable, immediately extinguished the faintest spark.

The scrapings of fiddles and the clattering of clogs stopped for a moment after Mr. Harding's entrance.

"I scarcely hoped Monsieur would have honoured us with his presence," said Madame.

"It is very kind of you, dear papa," cried Zoé.

"I want to speak to you, *mignonne*, when these small folk are gone; you will find me in the library," said her father.

"I will come at once if you wish it, papa."

"There is no hurry, little one. What I have to say will keep for two hours, at any rate. I see my august presence oppresses these small people. I will take my leave, and Pandemonium may be let loose again."

It certainly was a Pandemonium.

"Quel bruit épouvantable!" cried Madame, stopping her ears with her fingers; "on dirait que les esprits de l'enfer sont déchaînés."

A hundred Blankshire voices screaming their loudest, and a hundred pairs of Blankshire clogs stamping on the floor, make some noise.

The guests have eaten as nearly to repletion as is compatible with safety. The oranges and four-penny-pieces have been distributed, and silence once more reigns in the servants' hall.

Powder and Plush, in company with the female *élite* of the kitchen, seek consolation for their late degradation in a hot supper. They solicit Mary Dalton to remain, but that young person declines, and takes her leave; she holds herself aloof from high life below stairs.

Zoé has joined her father in the library. In our character of Asmodéus we will look in upon her there.

Mr. Harding has his arm around her supple waist; he is looking tenderly at her.

"You are pale, my pet," he says; "those young savages have been too much for you."

"Not at all, dear papa, you know I like these aborigines. What is it you have to tell me?"

"Petite curieuse," said the father, and he smiled, but the smile was a very sad one. "It is no pleasant story you have to listen to, child."

He sat down and shaded his face with his hand; he did not speak for some minutes. At length he said abruptly—

"Your dear mother was not my first wife, as you know, Zoé."

The little girl murmured some inaudible reply; she was startled by the strangeness of her father's manner.

"I made what is called a low match," he continued, "God help me! it was low enough. I never meant to revert to this miserable story in your hearing, Zoé, but it seems you must know it now." He sighed heavily.

Zoé drew near to him, and took his hand in hers.

"This wretched marriage separated me completely from my family. My father cursed me, and swore he would never see me more. He kept his word to the letter. My mother had been dead for years. I had one sister, I had well nigh forgotten her existence. Her memory has returned to me oddly to-night." Again he sighed heavily.

"I do not think very much affection ever existed between us," he said, speaking very hurriedly now. "She was weak, intensely selfish, and easily influenced. When my father left her all his money—it was a large sum she inherited—she made no effort to make amends for his injustice. I vowed that she should be as dead to me; only once have I broken that vow. I wrote to acquaint her with the death of the woman who had wrought me so much misery. She never answered that letter." He rose from his chair, and walked to and fro in an excited manner.

Zoé approached him, and threw her arms around him: he stopped suddenly and looked at her, and a change came over his face as he bent down to kiss her."

"I have startled you, my darling," he said in his old tones. "I have fluttered my pretty bird. See Zoé what it is that has raised this ghost from the past. I scarcely know how to act; you shall decide for me, little one. Look here, child," and he pointed to that portion of the 'Times' Supplement devoted to runaways.

"To Theodore Baynes Harding, who left England five-and-twenty years ago:—A dying sister longs for the forgiveness of an injured brother. Address, A. C. S., Post-office, Vere Street, London."

"You must write at once, papa," cried Zoé excitedly.

"I knew you would say so, *mignonne*."

CHAPTER VII.

Miss Alathea has turned out that geological hobby of hers to grass, for a month or so; she has likewise stabled many other ologies. She has mounted phrenology now, and is riding it to death. I think some of her friends will not be sorry when this last steed is consigned to the knacker's yard.

Zoé found the *bas bleu* deep in Combe, when she called at Rose Cottage the morning following that interview with her father in the library.

"I am so glad to see you, dear Zoé," said the student, "you have just arrived in time. I want to manipulate your head. I know your character so very well, it will be quite an interesting study to compare the analogy——"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Alathea, where is La Bonté? (Zoé had so rechristened Mary Snowe.) I wish so much to speak to her."

"You are as impetuous as ever, child. Let me see; which organ——"

"Do tell me where she is, dear La Sagesse," pleaded Zoé, who had stood godmother also at this baptism. "I am so very anxious to see her."

"She has gone to the post-office. The Indian Mail is in, and we are expecting a letter from Horace. The second delivery is at two, and it is now only half-past twelve; but Mary is, at times, quite as impatient as you, Zoé."

"I will wait until her return; but don't let me interrupt you, Miss Alathea."

"Take off your hat, my dear, I must manipulate your organs. I fancy adhesiveness and concentrativeness will be very largely developed. Self-esteem also will preponderate over love of approbation. No head can be properly balanced——"

"Have you really any faith in this science, La Sagesse?"

"Most assuredly. Psychologists differed formerly in the localisation of the seat of mind; some assigning the heart, others," she added with hesitation, "—the—stomach."

"Do you know I rather incline to that last theory," said Zoé.

Miss Alathea slightly frowned and continued:—

"Of late years it has been universally admitted

that the brain is the seat of our moral and intellectual perceptions, and as anatomists coincide in the opinion that the form of the head is materially influenced by cerebral ramifications, it appears to me that the science of phrenology has a more solid foundation than the world in general is willing to assign it. Have I expressed myself clearly?" said the lecturer with modest complacency.

"Clearly as crystal, La Sagesse, you are in great force to-day."

"Take off your hat, my dear."

Zoé obeyed, and her pretty head was presently under the hands of the operator.

"Precisely as I imagined. Causality very deficient. I have always told you, my dear, you are too apt to accept the surface. Conscientiousness, very large; self-esteem, large—quite right; love of approbation, moderate; concentrativeness and adhesiveness——How very provoking," suddenly exclaimed the phrenologist; "is not that Mrs. Bland coming up the walk?"

"Yes, it is," said Zoé, "I must arrange my hair; what a fright I am!"

The visitor entered. I have had occasion to refer to this lady in the preceding chapter. She is the widow of James Bland, who was one of our

small landed proprietors. Mrs. Bland is a good-natured woman enough, but one of the greatest gossips in Farnorth.

"*How* do you do, Miss Alathea?" she said, "occupied with some delightful study, as usual. I always hold you up as an example to my two girls, who complain of the dulness of a country life. How do *you* do, Miss Harding? How beautiful your hair is, my dear. Quite a picture, I'm sure."

The amiable lady was by this time seated.

"I just looked in to tell you the last piece of news," she continued. "What do you think, Miss Alathea? the Plantagenets are coming back to Foxcroft."

"Indeed," said the *bas bleu*, who was not, however, much interested in the intelligence.

"Yes, it is quite true; some old leases have fallen in, and they have paid off two or three of the mortgages on the estate. What a change it will make in the neighbourhood. Some one said the other day, that it was really time the aristocrats returned to Farnorth, for the Plutocrats were having it all their own way.

"I know who manufactured that speech," said Zoé, in a whispered aside to Miss Alathea, "I can

taste the pepper in the cream tart."—"It was Mr. Giles Houndly who said *that*, I am sure, Mrs. Bland," she added aloud.

"I quite forget," said the relict, blushing painfully, as she remembered too late in whose presence she was speaking; "but I was going to say Sir Mortimer Plantagenet, the present baronet, has not been at Foxcroft since he was eight years of age. He is said to be *so* handsome—quite a killer. I tell my daughters, Miss Harding, that you young ladies must take care of your hearts. Of course *you* are very different to my poor girls. Ah!" she added, with a sigh, "there is no change for the better since the days of good Mrs. Primrose. It is not, What is she? but, What *has* she? is all the cry."

"I have heard there was another son, and that some romantic story attaches to him," said Zoé, not altogether civilly breaking in upon the widow's lamentations.

"Ah, yes; such a sad thing! He was drowned, you know. It must be now nearly six and twenty years ago."

"I have never heard the particulars of his death," said Miss Alathea.

"Have you not, indeed?" said the widow, who

was delighted to have an opportunity of giving her tongue a holiday; "then I will tell you everything I know about it; and I think few people know more. Poor young man! he was only two-and-twenty. He had not been living at home for some time—he was not on good terms with his father. The old baronet married his daughters' governess very soon after the death of his first wife; and Mr. Frederick could not *abide* his stepmother," said Mrs. Bland, forgetting in her earnestness her ordinary company diction.

"Sir Mortimer, the present baronet, is the son of the second wife, is he not?" enquired Miss Alathea.

"Yes; the death of his eldest son, who was, I believe, his favourite child, in spite of their disagreements, almost broke his father's heart, at least so people said; but he certainly lived a good many years after it; however, of course, he must have felt it; such a fine young man and altogether. They left Foxcroft two or three years after the sad event."

"They had left a little time before we came here," said Miss Alathea.

"It was said that they went abroad on account of Lady Plantagenet's health. She was thrown

out of her carriage and seriously injured her spine; I believe she is on her back yet."

"You have not yet told us how the eldest son was drowned," remarked Zoé.

"Oh, no; and it was *such* a romantic incident. He was crossing in the steamer from Calais, and a little boy fell overboard, and Mr. Frederick—he was very brave and kind-hearted, poor fellow—threw himself into the water, and was drowned in attempting to save the child. All the papers were full of it; and *such* reports were circulated in Farnorth. I should be sorry to repeat them now; though it can't be denied the death of this poor young man was a grand thing for her present ladyship," added the widow, in rather an irrelevant manner.

"Was the second wife popular in Farnorth?" enquired Zoé.

"Not at all; we considered the match a fearful *mésalliance*. Of course you know," continued the relict, who was thoroughly imbued with the good old English feeling which prostrates us humbly on our knees before rank and a title, "of course we naturally looked up to the Plantagenets. Such a *very* old family; and we pitied the baronet's daughters, poor young ladies, so very

much. It was a dreadful thing for them, you know. She was scarcely any older——"

"And very handsome, I suppose," said Zoé.

"Yes, she was pretty-looking; but nothing to compare to the first Lady Plantagenet, who was niece to the Duke of Overall—one of the first families in the kingdom, you know. *I* remember her second ladyship when she was plain Miss Brown, and engaged to be married to Edward Sparkles—he succeeded to Mr. Giles Houndly's practice some years after—and a capital match she thought she was going to make at the time. I believe she was very fond of him, and he was quite madly in love with her; but, when the Baronet came forward, she threw her old love over. He took it very badly, I believe—you see he has never married. And now I must really say good morning. Good morning." And the talkative lady took her leave.

"Farnorth will be in a state of chronic ferment now until Foxcroft is tenanted," said Zoé. "When these fine people arrive we shall have excellent opportunities for studying the salient points of our species. Mr. Giles Houndly will go through all the moods and tenses of the verb 'to toady' to perfection. I *hate* that man."

"My dear Zoé," remonstrated Miss Alathea, "do not use such strong terms."

"I *do* hate him, La Sagesse. He is utterly selfish and heartless; he crawls abjectly to attain his own mean ends. He will fawn and flatter for the sake of a good dinner, and stab his host in the back with slander afterwards. His wicked tongue descends on all alike—he spares neither young or old, rich or poor, friend or foe. You know Miss Gray—her life is one long deprecating protest to Mrs. Grundy. She is a nervous, timid creature; not one of God's creatures leads a more innocent, harmless life than she. Giles Houndly lashed her cruelly with one of his 'they says' the other day." And the indignant tears rose to Zoé's bright eyes.

"What a shame!" cried the *bas bleu*, excitedly; "her very weakness should have protected her."

"Giles Houndly is just the man to respect such an Ægis," said Zoé, bitterly. "We will not speak of him any more. I think he developes all that is evil in my nature. Here is La Bonté at last."

Mary Snowe's face is radiant with some great joy. There is sunshine in every feature. She holds an open letter in her hand. Her voice is tremulous with delight.

"He is coming, Alathea. Horace is coming, dear Zoé. His regiment is ordered home. We shall see our dear boy again." And the speaker's eyes are suffused with a glad moisture.

The *bas bleu* is quite as much affected as her sister. "Dear Horace!" she murmurs, as she greedily devours every word in the flimsy missive. She reads some passages aloud:—

"I long to see you, my dear kind guardians," the nephew wrote. "I feel as I have so often felt at Sandhurst when the holidays drew near. I have increased in bulk since I saw you last. (I was at one time threatened with fat, but I waged war against the insidious foe, and conquered manfully). Huge wings have sprouted from my cheeks. They are of the colour *you* will call auburn—my enemies pronounce them red!—my hair had always a tendency in that direction, but you would never admit it."

"It had no such thing," said Miss Alathea. "Horace had beautiful hair, and as to the whiskers, I admire the tawny leonine hue; it is essentially British," added the patriotic lady.

"That is your nephew, is it not?" said Zoé, pointing to a vigorous crayon sketch which hung over the fireplace.

"Yes; it was taken when he was twelve years old. It did not do him justice," said the partial aunt.

It was not a strictly handsome face which looked at you so frankly from the gilded frame. The features were not classically moulded; but there was not a mean line about them. The brows were straight and well defined; the eyes, rather deep-set, blue, honest, and fearless.

There were several family portraits in this the dining-room of Rose Cottage. Some of these pictures wore the costumes of our great, great grandfathers and grandmothers. They were regarded with reverent awe by those of the Farnorthites, whose descent, poor souls, was of the murkiest. Mr. Giles Houndly had said something about "Monmouth Street and purchased ancestors," but his words fell unheeded. There was one portrait there, about which Zoé's tact soon learnt to observe a reticence. It represented a very beautiful girl. Miss Alathea murmurs "An ancestress," whenever admiring visitors draw her attention to this picture. The dress is certainly *rococo*, but too modern I think to have been worn by a predecessor of the amiable *bas bleu*.

Miss Alathea is still abstracting from the letter in her hand :—

"I am not very proud of any laurels I may have gained here. The god of war does not show to great advantage when his civilized weapons are raised against the breasts of naked savages. I am sick 'o' *sic* warfare,' as Farnorth would say. (The pun, vile though it be, is creditable with the thermometer 96° in the shade.) Don't, however, for one moment imagine I am pining to become one of those gentlemen of England who live at home at ease."

("Horace always dreaded being a carpet knight," says the reader. "I shall examine his head when he comes home. I am persuaded combativeness must be very largely developed.")

"I have some fine specimens of butterflies to add to aunt Ally's collection. I put them to death in the easiest manner I could devise. I have also a venomous snake preserved in spirit for her. It had run to earth in my boot, and I killed it without much regard for its personal comfort."

"I am so glad Horace is leaving India. His profession is quite sufficiently dangerous without these collateral disadvantages, if I may be allowed

the expression," said the euphuist, as she carefully refolded the precious letter. "Zoé has some secret to communicate, Mary," she continued. "The little girl has been dying to reveal it for the last two hours."

"I think you ought to give me great credit for self-control, La Sagesse, since you found out this morning that I have not the organ of secretiveness. I have not, indeed. I dislike secrets very much. I have no hidden springs or private drawers in my head to guard them. I should not have behaved one whit better than the classical barber under similar circumstances. What I am so anxious to tell you now though, can scarcely be called a secret, as all the good people of Farnorth who take in the 'Times' must know it, and are no doubt weaving a romance out of it at this moment." And she proceeded to make her friends acquainted with those particulars about the advertisement, which the reader already knows.

"I am sorry I did not advise papa to go at once to the address given, instead of writing. It would be so very dreadful if my poor aunt were to die before she sees him," said Zoé.

"You have never heard of her before?" enquired Mary.

"Never. Until last night I had not the slightest idea I owned a single English relation but papa. Mamma was his second wife, you know, and his first marriage estranged him completely from his family, because——"

Zoé hesitated, and coloured painfully.

Her friends, with ready tact, perceived the child had ventured upon ice that would not bear. Mary was ready with the humane drags directly.

"I hope the poor lady is not so ill as the advertisement leads one to infer," she said. "And now tell me, dear, are you any worse after your exertions last night?"

"Not in the slightest degree, La Bonté. I think my entertainment was a great success. Thanks to uniformity of costume, we had *égalité* and *fraternité* this time. How very lovely Mary Dalton looked when she was slightly flushed," said Zoé.

"She is very pretty," answered her friend, rather coldly.

"Not a good head," said Miss Alathea, sententiously. "A great want of conscientiousness and veneration; self-esteem and love of approbation inordinately developed."

* * * *

Zoé Harding was quite right when she pro

phesied that Farnorth would weave a romance out of that advertisement in the 'Times.' Mr. Giles Houndly took the shuttle in his hand, and produced a splendid woof. It would have been a much better thing for this neighbourhood if Giles had never emerged from his obscurity. What on earth did Jane Hopkins see in him to admire? I am sure I do not know; but every one knows she had good reason to repent the sequence to that admiration. He was, I believe, meek and lowly enough whilst he was courting the heiress of Gothic Hall; but no sooner was he lord and master of that lady and her domain than he took the reins of government into his own hands, and reigned an absolute monarch. I am afraid Giles bullied not a little, Jane, that beloved and lamented wife of his—she dared not say her soul was her own. He sequestered the whole of her income; he allowed her but a trifling amount of pin-money, and audited the expenditure even of that. "I cannot afford to wear real lace now," the poor lady was wont to say to her intimate friends. "I have given as much as ten shillings a yard for my tuckers before I was married," she would add dolefully.

Giles carried the woof he had woven to pretty

nearly every house in Farnorth. "I always said Harding was so uncommonly mysterious. Who has ever heard him allude to his antecedents in the very remotest manner, sir? What are we to think about this story of the dying sister longing for forgiveness, &c., &c., eh, sir? It is clear enough to me what it is. I have not the slightest doubt, sir, that this woman has been guilty of some capital offence, for which her brother has suffered. They say these ticket-of-leave men make large fortunes in our penal settlements. Depend upon it, sir, Harding was one of the lucky ones before he came here."

CHAPTER VIII.

"HURRAH! he has risen to the fly already, Clarry." cried Algernon Silvester delightedly, as he entered the drawing-room, bearing an unopened letter, addressed to A. C. S., Post-office, Vere Street, in his hand. "Let us see what he says."

There were but a few words, requesting A. C. S. to communicate further particulars to T. B. Harding, Becklands.

"I may write now, I suppose, Mademoiselle Talleyrand," said Algy.

"Certainly," replied his daughter, "but you must not allow your pen any wild goose flights."

"I shall ask him to come up at once and see his sister. I do hope your mother will restrain her grumbling propensities."

"Administer extreme unction to that hope, *mon père*, for it will expire at mamma's first words. To grumble is as necessary to her as to breathe."

"By George! I've done my best to curb her

tongue," said Algy, (and to give him his due he had). "These Farnorth people know how to squeeze their orange," he continued. "Another princely donation; I saw it in one of the papers. They bleed him freely."

"*Tant mieux*," answered his daughter, "he will be accustomed to the process by the time you take him in hand."

Algy smiled grimly. "We must have money somehow," he said, "I have a very heavy pot on the Derby; if it capsizes, I tell you candidly, Clarry, I don't know where to turn; as to asking any of my confounded relations——"

"You have knocked so frequently at their door without success, it would be only a waste of time to try again," said his daughter.

"A precious lot better off am I for my good blood," said Algy, savagely. "I might just as well have been a tinker's son, and you, Clarry, with both blood and beauty——"

"Have been bowled out by the squinting daughter of a rich cheesemonger, you were going to say."

"Well, there's no denying it, when money enters for the matrimonial cup, beauty is pretty certain to be scratched. It is a mercenary age,

ma fille. A gentleman can no longer take to the road; and so, when he is in difficulties now-a-days, he waylays an heiress. I threw my first love over when I went in for your mother, and a nice business I made of it."

"I do not usually supplement mamma's dirges, but I must say you made a worse business of it when you lost her money. Your turf education was a costly one, papa."

"I was not ruined by the turf, Clarry," said Algy, impatiently. "It was that confounded 'Amalgamated Anglican and American' that drifted me into low water; I have told you so a dozen times, young lady."

Clara smiled, but she did not make any further remark. Algy was fond of alluding to his losses in the 'Amalgamated Anglican.' They were really very inconsiderable, but they were about the most legitimate and respectable he had sustained during his reckless career.

"Any fellow might have been taken in by that company, and I don't pretend to be wiser than my neighbours," continued Algy; "however, there is no good to be done in moaning over spilt milk. Let us take opportunity by the forelock, now we have him. There is a cousin arisen for you,

Clarry, as well as an uncle. Here she is in print, and he read an extract from the newspaper he held in his hand—"At the launch of the 'Sarah Jane,' on Tuesday last, the ceremony of christening the new vessel was most gracefully performed by the lovely daughter of Theodore B. Harding, Esq., of Becklands."

"We could very well have dispensed with this daughter of the barmaid," said Miss Silvester, rather scornfully.

"The young lady is not the daughter of that deceased individual. Your mother says she is pretty nearly certain Harding had no children by his first wife. I have been making some enquiries, *sub rosa*, and I find that this lovely daughter (a griffin to *you*, I'll be bound, Clarry) is the child of the second wife, a Peruvian party."

"Have you decided on the incurable complaint which is killing mamma?" said Clara, smiling.

"Yes, I have settled all that. Maria has fancied her heart affected for years now (it ails nothing, but she has palpitation when she eats too much). Heart disease is a variable complaint, as all the world knows, so it will not be astonishing if the 'dying sister' should be tolerably well when

she welcomes her 'injured brother.' Can you think of a better extemporary malady?"

"I could suggest nothing that would so well suit the case. We are wasting a great amount of ingenuity if this newly arisen uncle should not prove so rich as we fancy him to be."

"There's no doubt of his wealth. From the enquiries I've made I find he must have an income of at least twenty thousand a year; the profits of a mine he is very successfully working, lucky devil! If we had only a tenth part of it, Clarry!"

"'Give me standing room, and I will raise the world,' said Archimedes. It is standing room I want, papa."

"And standing room you shall have, *ma belle*, if I can get it for you, by fair means or foul," said the admiring father, as he arranged his writing materials; "and now, *pour commencer*, Clarry. It won't do to be too affectionate at first."

"My dear Sir,

"In compliance with your request I hasten to communicate further particulars in connection with my poor suffering wife, your only sister—('that is putting the left spur in, Clarry'). It was at her earnest prayer, at a moment when the angel of

death was waving his sombre wings—(' you don't approve of *that, ma fille,* but I think it's uncommonly poetical, so it shall stand')—I inserted the advertisement in the ' Times,' which has so fortunately arrested your attention. So many years have elapsed since the unfortunate event which led to a disunion in your family, that I scarcely dared to hope the appeal of a dying sister would so soon have met with a response from her injured brother. There is a slight change for the better in our beloved sufferer. The medical attendant (I have secured the best that money can procure) whispers hope, that tho' permanent recovery is out of the question (the disease is of the heart) she may still, with care, be preserved for some years to gladden the hearts of her affectionate husband and daughter. —[' I defy you to beat that,' said the writer, as he stopped a moment for further inspiration.] —Fate has been to us an avenging Nemesis. The whole of the money which so unfairly reverted to my dear wife is dissipated."

"You must efface all that, papa," interrupted his daughter.

"Why so?" said Algy, who was not a little proud of this rather classical period.

"There is more than a *soupçon* of the mendi-

cant's whine about it. We must not begin our trade too soon."

"Perhaps you are right," said her father, as with a slight sigh he crossed out the obnoxious passage. "Let me see," he continued, "where was I before I made that flight. Oh, I must go on from here: Rejoice the hearts of her affectionate husband and daughter. Her only cry to me is, Dear Algernon, entreat my brother to come to me! May I implore you, my dear Mr. Harding—('I am writing my way on to the confidential')—to listen to her prayer. She is comparatively well at present, but her malady may at any moment take an unfavourable turn. I should never forgive myself, if any want of effort on my part prevented that solace to her death-bed which her gentle spirit demands. The journey from the north is, I fear, an expensive one, but we may be able to come to some arrangement on the subject—('there is nothing of the mendicant's whine about that Clarry')—may I entreat you to lose no time in hastening to bring the consolation of your presence; and believe me, my dear Mr. Harding,

"Very faithfully yours,

"Algernon Charles Silvester."

"And now I must make a fair copy of it. You shall overhaul it afterwards, Clarry. My spelling is not much to boast of, in spite of my University education"—[he was plucked for his little Go, and bade farewell to Alma Mater after having taken that honour]. "I make a mull of the participles, and hang it, the dictionary don't help one there."

"Had you not better rehearse the *rôle* you propose to yourself to play?" said Clara, when the letter was sealed and addressed.

"What do you mean?" enquired her father. "*Ah, je comprends*—the affectionate husband. No; it will be *triste* enough, by Jove, when the time comes; I don't suppose Mokanna smothered his grim face in his silver veil in private."

"He raised it once in public though, and quite destroyed his *prestige*. Be warned by the prophet's fate, and keep yours well down."

Algernon sighed. "One has to work marvellously hard for an honest living in this world. Your mother is certain, as you say, to begin spinning her old dismal yarn the very moment her brother arrives. I don't know whether it would not have been better if I had said her complaint was softening of the brain—it takes its own time in killing, as well as the other disease, and would have accounted

for some of her eccentricities, eh, Clarry?" he said thoughtfully.

"We cannot provide against all contingencies; we must trust to chance. Be advised by me, and rehearse your part a little in private. Here is mamma." And the young Machiavelli left the room.

The expression of Mrs. Silvester's face has not improved since we saw her last. Its lines are as peevish as ever. She totters under a weight of grievances, which she hastens to deposit in the presence of her husband.

"My dress has just come home, and it won't meet by an inch, and the skirt is *so* badly cut; but of course, what can one expect when one has to employ a woman who knows nothing, just because she is cheap? Oh, dear me! if poor papa were alive, and could only see. I used to have all my dresses sent from Paris, and now——"

"Perhaps you may have them from Paris again, Polly, who knows?" said her husband cheerily. "You don't look well, my dear, I consulted Dr. —— about the palpitation you complain of, and he says we must take very great care of you."

"Good Lord! Mr. Silvester," cried his wife, all in a tremor, "you don't mean to say there is really anything dangerous the matter with my heart?"

"Don't alarm yourself, Maria, there is no immediate danger. Of course now we will take every care of you. You must avoid all excitement; and really, my dear, that constant recurrence to your loss of fortune is most prejudicial. No one can regret that unhappy accident more than I do; but your state is now so critical, I have no doubt the action of your heart is abnormally excited every time you allude to it."

Mrs. Silvester sank back on the sofa, faint with terror. Her affectionate husband handed her a glass of wine. She was malleable in his hands now, as metal which has passed the fire.

"You are exciting yourself without cause," Algy continued; "I repeat there is no fear of immediate danger; care is what you require. Change of air might be beneficial to you, the doctor says; unfortunately my funds are at present low, and I cannot afford to move. By the way, my dear, it is very probable you may see that rich brother of yours in the course of a few days. I put an advertisement in the 'Times,' and he has answered it. I have written, requesting him to come and see you at once. There is no doubt he is possessed of great wealth, and——"

"I am his own flesh and blood," moaned the

lady, "he can't deny *that*. I'm sure he has a right to help me. It would be very hard, when he is rolling in money, to let his only sister want for anything," she added, forgetting how very differently she had argued when the circumstances were reversed.

"Remember, Maria, we are not supposed to know your brother is rich. It would never do to let out that, you know. He might cut up rusty, if he thought we wanted anything out of him, just at first. We must wait a bit. When I wrote to him, I only said you wanted to see him."

"I'm sure I don't care about seeing him, if he will give me nothing; but he can't be so cruel. When I'm so ill too," whined Madam, who devoutly believed in her imaginary ailment.

"You had better go and lie down," said her husband, inwardly blessing his daughter, as he saw how admirably her scheme worked. His amiable helpmate slowly retired to follow his advice.

* * * *

Zoé Harding was no little excited when her father handed her the precious epistle whose composition we have watched.

"You must go at once, dear papa," the little maid said, all a-blaze with affectionate sympathy.

"My poor aunt seems to be very fortunate in her husband. How kindly he speaks of her; and how very delightful it will be for me to have a cousin; somehow or other I do not get on very well with the girls of my own age here, and——"

"You have been very dull with your old father, *mignonne*,—I——" but a tiny hand on his lips prevented all further speech.

The master of Becklands left by the earliest train that day, and in due course a letter from him arrived for his daughter.

"I should not have known my sister," the writer said, "but no wonder, thirty years effect marvellous changes. She is in better health than I expected to find her, but you will be surprised to hear, she and her family are in far from flourishing circumstances. It appears her husband has been very unfortunate, and the large fortune she had has melted away; they cannot even provide the luxuries that are so imperatively necessary for my sister's failing health. I cannot say I am prepossessed in favour of my newly found brother-in-law. I am told he is of good family, but the man is decidedly vulgar. There is a want of refinement about him; his conversation is flavoured with the stable, and besprinkled with more oaths than are

altogether pleasant; however, he appears very kind to his wife, which is the more creditable, as, between you and me, she is peevish and *exigeante.* She always was. The daughter, *la belle cousine,* about whom my pet was so anxious, is very different to her parents. She is splendidly handsome, and her manners are highly finished. She will be a nice companion for my darling. And now, *petite châtelaine,* you must make hospitable preparations to receive these new relatives at Becklands. I have invited them to stay with me, as the doctor recommends change of air for your aunt. She is sitting near me as I write, and I can scarcely believe she is the sister of my youth. She was a rather pretty, fair girl, as slight as a gazelle, when I saw her last. She is a faded, stout, elderly woman now. I dare say time has played the same havoc with me. I shall remain in London for a few days, and I trust to my *mignonne* to have everything in readiness for our arrival."

La petite châtelaine was very busy, you may rest assured. She looked forward with unmixed delight to the advent of these relatives. Not so Madame. The good lady was quite disconsolate; she apprehended all manner of disagreeables as

likely to result to herself from this threatened visit. "Je suis fachée d'apprendre que ces gens arrivent," she said, "vous ne serez plus ma mignonne, petite Zoé, cette tante et la cousine auront peut-être de la morgue. Peut-être seront-elles d'un esprit insulaire. Ma foi! que sais-je; elles me regarderont comme ménagère, moi!" she cried, and the indignant tears stood in her eyes. Zoé had some difficulty in allaying her fears and smoothing the ruffled feathers.

Again, dear reader, I must carry you in my arms, as the Geni carried Bedredden Hassan, and deposit you in those apartments I have described in Noname Street, Fashionable Square. The Silvesters are holding a family council. Their guest has departed to his hotel. Clara Silvester no longer wears that elderly black gown of hers. The beauty of her figure, and the transparency of her complexion are made still more evident by a dark blue silk dress, so handsomely fashioned, that I am persuaded it must have been built on credit. Algernon Charles is also *en grande tenue.* His habiliments indicate the style called "horsey," the principal features being a cut-away coat, and a general tightness of the nether integuments. Mrs. Silvester is dressed as

an invalid; but her healthy appearance by no means accords with her raiment. You may observe a decided improvement in all the appointments of their *ménage*. A judicious application of ready money has given birth to a very centipede of credit. A handsome harp and a piano occupy a prominent position in the apartment. A few vases of hot-house flowers give an air of freshness, and the promise of a very excellent supper, a decided air of comfort, to the general arrangements.

"I'm mighty glad its over," said Algy, with a sigh of relief. "I may take off my veil, and breath now, Clarry. Confound it, I'm half stifled. What do you think of him, young lady?"

"Do you know I rather like him. He is a little *rococo*, but still very charming. His manners are a happy mixture of Sir Charles Grandison and Le Grand Monarque."

"He's a proud, pragmatical prig—that's *my* opinion," said Algy, with alliterative candour.

"I know you don't care for refinement," said his daughter. "I confess I do. He has been very handsome, and is still distinguished looking. I don't see any likeness to you, mamma."

"I should hope you did not," cried the invalid.

"Why he's as gray as gray, and I'm sure I'm not." And she complacently stroked her own hair, of a dull drab hue, as yet almost intact. "He was always so very dark, and I am still as fair—as—fair," said the lady, who was not strong in similes.

"Well, let us have some supper," cried Algy. "By Jove! we all stand in need of refreshment after our exertions. I shall polish off some porter without loss of time," which he did, likewise extending the same burnishing process to several glasses of sherry.

"You will have to restrain some of those strong adjectives of yours in future," said Clara. "I saw the rich man shudder more than once when you were very energetic."

"Nay, hang it, Clara, I must rap out an oath now and then, it is such a relief. I hope, mademoiselle, you observed my dexterity in sowing seeds for an invitation."

"Yes, and I think it probable we may soon reap the harvest of your sowing."

"Won't you take the shine out of your country cousin!" cried Algy.

"Country cousins are an extinct race," said Clara, "the railroads have destroyed them. I

have no doubt we shall find this young provincial as much at home in her silks and satins as we are, perhaps more so, as her finery is of course paid for."

"I'm sure it's not my fault we have so many bills," whimpered Mrs. Silvester, "you need not twit me with *that*, Clara. Any one who had a hundred thousand pounds to her fortune——"

"By Jove! Maria," cried Algy, determined to make a diversion from the dreaded topic, "won't you have palpitations to-morrow, if you wolf away at lobster salad in that fashion. Mind, I have told you what the doctor says. If you don't take very great care——"

Not another note of her favourite dirge did Maria utter that evening. She sat with her fingers pressed on the pulse of her wrist, waiting with terror its slightest acceleration.

Business detained Mr. Harding in London much longer than the time he had specified. It was nearly a month before he arrived at Becklands, with his three companions.

CHAPTER IX.

Rose Cottage, which has been as the temple of Cybele for the last three or four years, is now profaned. The mirrors in the drawing-room reflect the image of the tall soldier, and chairs and ottomans groan under his unwonted weight.

The maiden sisters are in paradise. How proud they are of this large piece of humanity. How handsome and manly their boy is, the poor ladies think. Truly he is a fine, soldierly fellow, this Horace Snowe, lieutenant in her majesty's—— (I am not going to specify the regiment). Observe him as he is lolling upon the sofa—he has imported some lounging propensities from India—did you ever see a handsomer Englishman? Look at the breadth of his shoulders, the depth of his chest, and the symmetry of limb, for which he is remarkable. His face is more open to criticism than his figure, yet it pleases you better than many a one more perfectly featured; and mark

how finely the head is poised. Miss Alathea will not have much difficulty in manipulating its developments, for the hair is cut as close as close can be. A thick moustache shades the soldier's upper lip, and mingles with those whiskers referred to in his letter. He was quite correct when he pronounced on their colour—they are of the hue doated upon by the pre-Raphaelites, and regarded with considerable favour by me. Good looks are not the only heritage of Horace Snowe. He is a noble-hearted fellow, perhaps a little passionate and hasty in temper, but brave, honest, and brim-full of manly tenderness; being a true Britisher, he is of course rather ashamed of this last, and is disposed very frequently to reverse the whole fable, and fling the ass's skin over his lion strength.

Miss Alathea is busily engaged arranging the butterflies which her nephew has brought her. Mary is making the tour of her district, and so the *bas bleu* and the new arrival are alone this morning.

"I can scarcely believe," said Horace, "that the wonderfully pretty creature who passed the gate just now is really Polly Dalton, the little girl I fished out of the lake, seven or eight years ago."

"Your sojourn in India has not improved your English, my dear boy. Yes, that is really the young person whom you rescued from a watery grave."

"And a great benefit I conferred on society by so doing," said the soldier. "She is lovely as a moonbeam; for that lunar simile best suits her pale young beauty."

"Her face is about the best thing she has," said Alathea, condescending in her eagerness to common parlance; "she is——"

"Whatever her faults may be," said Horace, "she is of the look-in-her-face-and-you'll-forget-them-all species."

"She is very selfish," said his aunt, "she is inflated with vanity, and has ideas not at all in accordance with her very humble position."

"*There* you go," cried her nephew; "you most feminine Britisher, with your pride of caste; you are no better than the Hindoos. Because this little maid has not the yellow streaks upon her fair forehead, is she——"

"Don't be provoking, Horace," interrupted Miss Alathea. "I am not influenced by anything of the kind. This girl has not a good disposition. Observe the formation of her head."

"Nay, if you condemn the poor child on the strength of phrenology, I have done. Do you know, most sage lady, your pet science makes sad havoc with our moral responsibilities?"

"I do not understand you," said the *bas bleu.*

"Why, assuming persons to be sent into the world with bumps upon their heads, which, according to you phrenologists, indicate that they possess certain vices, they are no more accountable for their failings than a man is for limping if he has one leg shorter than the other."

"That is a mere materialist's view of the question," said Miss Alathea, girding herself up for a strong controversy. "Mind as associated with matter——"

"I beg your pardon," said Horace, shirking the contest, "is there not some one ringing at the door bell?"

"It is Zoé Harding," said Miss Alathea; "I am so glad she has come."

"You mean the Peruvian princess, daughter of the great nabob of Becklands, don't you?"

"Yes, I want you to see her so very much. She——"

Zoé's entrance stopped all further speech. The little lady was looking her best; exercise and the

cold air had freshened her young cheeks, and brightened her dark eyes. She was smothered in costly furs.

Zoé was excessively anxious to explain to her friend the reasons for her early visit; indeed, she took such an infinity of pains on the subject that I am inclined to think some other motive, more powerful than the one she had assigned, had guided her tiny footsteps in the direction of Rose Cottage. I believe she wished to see the big soldier, and, in my opinion, the wish was perfectly natural. Those Belgravian beauties, who are never at a loss for some one to flirt with, and who frequent balls and *soirées* where partners are abundant, have no conception of the dearth of these desirables in a country town. The London belles complain that they have very few "eligibles" —they are most of them "detrimentals" they say. We must shatter a great many soda-water bottles before we acquire the certainty of aim which brings down a tiger. The pretty girls in Farnorth cannot have this rifle practice. The poor things have only had the young curate to say pleasant things to them for the last twelve months. The reverend bee in a honey-pot has caused some buzzing amongst the queens of his congregation.

His day will be over now, and I am glad of it. He has latterly been posing himself *en grand seigneur*. [I believe nice little Sophy Bland is very fond of him, and I am not certain whether he is as grateful as he ought to be]; but as I said he has had his day. Sword will triumph over Gown, for the red rag is potent as ever with women and turkeys.

"I wanted to consult La Bonté about the quantity of coals and blankets to be given away this Christmas. Papa is from home, you know, and I should not have called so early, but——"

"You are always welcome, my dear, and more so than ever this morning. Permit me;" and Miss Alathea went through the introduction in the good old-fashioned manner.

The lady and gentleman bowed.

Zoé was rather shy and bashful in the presence of this son of Mars. Young ladies in their teens about the time of the First Exhibition had not, I fancy, the delightful *aplomb* and ease of manner possessed by the charming crinolined belles of the Great International Second.

"Papa is not coming home for some days," said Zoé, speaking very quickly and addressing Miss Alathea, so as to prevent the soldier having an

innings. "He has invited my newly-found relatives, and I am so busy making preparations for them."

"Your aunt is better then?" enquired Miss Alathea.

"Much better than papa expected to find her, but she is still a great invalid, and change of air is recommended for her. Papa is charmed with my cousin; he says she is quite beautiful. I am so anxious to see her, and now I must wish you good morning;" and the small lady hurried away, without having exchanged one single word with the big gentleman, leaving him not a little piqued thereat.

"Don't you call her pretty?" asked Alathea, when the meteor had vanished.

"Very," said Horace, shortly.

"She is very original," said the aunt.

"She did not give any proof of it to-day," quoth the nephew. "The few words she uttered had the usual flavour of young-ladyism."

"She is so fresh in her feelings, so free from conventionalisms," continued the *bas bleu*. "In these days, when society is so hag-ridden by conformity, when a dragon is planted in the path to strangle at its birth the faintest bleat of self-

assertion, it is quite refreshing to meet individuality of character."

"I know some people take great pains to cultivate blue roses; for my part, I prefer them of their natural colour," said the soldier sulkily.

"Why Horace, what a turncoat you are!" cried his aunt; "I have so often heard you complain—"

"Have you got to learn what inconsistent mortals we are, *mia Zia?* But let me help you with your butterflies; that death's-head moth has no business there;" and so nothing more was said of the young heiress of Becklands.

There were a great many visitors to Rose Cottage that day. It was really quite wonderful. Miss Alathea had been suffering from a slight cold, and every one was so very kind in making enquiries, as the amiable lady said. Mrs. Bland and her daughters brought some black-currant jelly [made by the dear girls themselves, as the relict told the invalid, so very nice and soothing for the throat you know].

Mr. Giles Houndly met Zoé Harding as she was returning home, and kindly accompanied her, though she could very well have dispensed with his escort.

"Ahem! So you have been to see the red-

whiskered nigger slayer, Miss Harding. The old maids will have plenty of visitors *now*, you may depend. Ahem! men are scarce articles in Farnorth. The Reverend Archibald Middleton is quite down in the mouth. The red-coat will put *his* nose out. All you young ladies will be pulling caps for this soldier with no name in particular. They say, ahem! old Mary Snowe is quite happy now she has her—nephew—as I suppose we must call him."

Zoé's face was crimson with indignation.

"Miss Mary Snowe," said the little girl, "is as happy as any one can be who leads so pure and good a life as she does. *You* are not likely to understand that kind of happiness I should say, Mr. Houndly."

"That's one for me," quoth Giles. "Hang it, I like your spirit, young lady."

["That insignificant chit of Harding's, sir, is a downright vixen," he said to the next acquaintance he met. "Ahem! they say there's a touch of the blacking-brush. I pity the man who gets her, heavily weighted though she may be, sir."]

"They tell me you are expecting visitors at Becklands," he continued to his young companion.

"My aunt, her husband, and daughter accompany papa on his return," she answered coldly.

"Nothing like a reputation for riches for bringing to light poor relations. Cousins to the fortieth remove will remember their affinity, without any help from the herald's office; just as they did in the days of old Oliver Goldsmith. The Plantagenets are coming back to Farnorth. Ahem! we shall have something like entertainments again; no vulgar ostentation, you know—things out of season, and that kind of display—but such dinners as these people with really good blood in their veins know how to give. How was it you walked alone this morning? Madame did not approve of that call at Rose Cottage, eh, Miss Zoé? Good morning, I have a meeting to attend in the town." And, so speaking, Giles relieved the little heiress of his unwelcome presence.

In spite of that opinion the soldier had expressed about the blue and red roses, it was wonderful how very anxious he was to see the Peruvian princess again. He remained at home for several mornings, and although he pretended to take a great interest in arranging those butterflies for Miss Alathea, I know very well what kept him within doors. He was not rewarded. Giles's venomous hints had stung little Zoé, and she exiled herself from her friends. Then my lord

Rufus volunteered to accompany Mary Snowe in her visits of charity. His tall figure might be seen any day in the small cottages. He was a very Solomon in the advice he gave about the proper distribution of coals and blankets. He contributed liberally to the fund, and made glad the hearts of his aunts by his benevolence. He was always as liberal as the day, they said. The hypocrite affected surprise when he met the young mistress of Becklands at one of the cottages; as if he had not heard of Zoé's charities almost the moment he arrived at Farnorth.

The little girl had quite rallied from that fit of bashfulness of hers, and Horace had no reason to complain of a want of originality in her remarks. He has said he did not admire blue roses. So, I suppose, it was simply curiosity which made him so eagerly inhale the fragrance of this one.

Zoé has finished all her hospitable preparations for her expected guests. That suite of rooms, commanding such a lovely view of the Bay, is to be devoted to them. The two bed-rooms and dressing-rooms communicate with a charming boudoir, where, as the young mistress says, "my aunt and cousin can retire when they are weary of our

company." Madame still does not relish the idea of this influx. I believe she is only influenced by jealousy, but she declares that she is "horriblement prévenue contre ces gens." And she will not admire or take interest in any of the arrangements.

* * * *

It is the last evening the Silvesters will have to pass in those apartments in Noname Street, Fashionable Square. Madam, the landlady, has presented her little account and been paid in full; a handsome *douceur* has also been given to the maid of all work. All the confiding tradespeople, who were requested yesterday to lose no time in forwarding their bills, as the parties were about to leave town, have done so in simple faith. If they live until they are paid, the venerable Parr was as a youth cut off in his early prime, compared to them. "Our movements are so very uncertain," said Algy, when he politely wished good bye to his hostess the following morning, "it may possibly be a week before we are settled. I will write immediately we are so, and enclose a cheque, which you will perhaps be kind enough to distribute amongst these different claimants," he added, as he gathered the many gentle reminders into a neat packet.

[The landlady has not received the promised letter, and those civil creditors are as raging wolves; and yet, Algernon Charles Silvester would have shot any man who called him a welsher.]

Mr. Harding gave a very fine dinner at his hotel to his relatives, the last night he was in town.

"You had better go to bed at once, Maria," said Algy to his wife, when they had returned to their apartments. "You have a long journey to make to-morrow."

"I feel very unwell," groaned his helpmate, "I have such a fluttering in my side, and a tingling in my arm. The landlady says they are very dangerous symptoms. I'm no more fit to travel than anything," she added dolefully.

"You've eaten too much dinner, and want sleep," said her affectionate husband. "I tell you what, Clarry, that heart complaint is the best idea I ever swooped upon," he said to his daughter, when he had disposed of his better half.

"It has been powerful in laying the ghosts of her other grievances," said Clara. "I do not think she has alluded to her loss of fortune once this evening.

"I told her that a constant recurrence to it

was very exciting for her in her present weak state of health. 'Gad, she believed me, Clarry," said Algy, showing his white teeth.

"This newly found uncle of mine can take a great quantity of wine," said Clara, thoughtfully.

"That he most certainly can. By George," cried Algy, "I never in my life met a fellow who could polish off so much. I thought I could carry off my two bottles as well as any man, but I'm a fool to Harding; and he's no more affected by it than if he drank water, is he?"

Clara did not answer her father. She had thrown herself back in her chair, in her favourite attitude, and her beautiful eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"That man has a Lazaretto," she said at last.

"A *what?*" cried Algy in amazement.

"I have watched him very narrowly lately. His pest house may have but one tenant, but the scaly monster leads his keeper a weary life."

"What *are* you driving at Clara? are you gone wild, girl? What on earth do you mean?" said her father.

"I mean that your rich brother-in-law is a very unhappy man, and that he hides an ugly secret somewhere."

"By Jove! if he does, I know who will unearth

it. You are as good as a Red-skin in hunting one down, if you once get on the trail, Clarry."

"There is not a bent twig, not the faintest foot-print as yet to guide me through the maze," said Clara. "Has Midas ever alluded to his Peruvian life?"

"Never once; he is the very closest fellow I ever came across. He must have led a queer vagabond life for those many years that we have heard nothing about him; and yet you would think, to look at him, that he had never left the haunts of civilisation. He don't give one the idea of being a happy man, as you say, Clarry. 'Gad if I stood in his shoes, I would be as jolly as a sandboy, if I had half-a-dozen skeletons hidden in my blue chamber."

"He has evidently a more tender conscience than you are gifted with. I am certain he has something on his mind—I——"

"Well, my handsome American-Indian, you will shortly have plenty of time and opportunity to hunt that something out; but I doubt whether the game will be worth the chase; and now I must say good night," said Algy, "I shall have a splitting headache to-morrow, I know," he muttered, as he retired with rather unsteady steps to his sleeping chamber.

CHAPTER X.

Snow lies very thick upon the hills of Farnorth. The tarns and ponds are frozen hard. The blankets and coals so liberally distributed amongst the cottages are real boons. Such an inclement season has not been known for years. "It is a reglar äde-fashioned Curstmas," the poor people say.

The large drawing-room at Becklands is brilliantly lighted. The rich silk curtains are closely drawn. Powder and Plush are arranging the dining-table: it glistens with glass and silver. Bright fires burn in every room. That suite of apartments apportioned to the coming guests is redolent of comfort. The little hostess, charmingly arrayed—the sheen of her dress resembles the plumage of the pheasant's breast—is trying to curb her impatience with crochet. Madame sits with her hands unemployed. She is still haunted with a dread lest these people should look upon

her "*comme ménagère*," as she says, and the idea is quite insupportable.

The carriage has been gone to the railway station some little time. Hark! there is a sound of rapid wheels crunching the hard gravel; the house-dog barks furiously, the fairy web drops from the hands of the fabricator; Madame remains gloomily composed, she will not compromise her dignity one iota. The door-bell is pulled violently; the house-dog's fierce bark changes to a bay of welcome. Black Sam's face looms in the open doorway, and shows to advantage in a background of snow. Mr. Harding comes rapidly forward; in a moment Zoé is gathered closely in his arms. Three individuals, wrapped in their travelling costumes, gaze on the meeting. The little hostess disengages herself from her father's embrace, and hospitably welcomes the arrivals. She kisses her aunt and cousin; Algy approaches to share the same favour, but a small hand is given this time instead of the rosy lips. The light in the hall falls upon Mrs. Silvester's peevish face. Clara's beauty is hidden beneath a thick veil.

"You must be very tired," said Zoé. "Will you go to your rooms at once?"

"I am half-dead," whined Mrs. Silvester, "I

told Mr. Silvester I was no more fit to travel than anything; but no one cares for what I say."

"You will perhaps feel better after you have had some dinner," said Zoé; "it will be ready in half-an-hour. Don't hurry yourself, dear aunt."

"Hurry myself indeed, child," cried the lady. "Do you know I might fall a corpse at your feet any moment, if I were to walk too quickly. Oh dear me! I hope we have not to climb up many stairs."

"Your rooms are on the first floor. I selected them in order that you might have as little fatigue as possible."

Half-a-dozen more groans, and Mrs. Silvester is landed in her dressing-room. A neat elderly maid is stationed there to attend upon her.

Annette, Zoé's own particular body-guard, offers her services to assist mademoiselle; but mademoiselle very soon dismisses her. A personal attendant is about the only one appanage of fine-ladyism which Clara does not affect. "The assistance they render you does not compensate for their prying propensities," she says, in speaking of this class of servitors.

Clara breathes a sigh of intense satisfaction, as she looks around on the appointments of her room.

The rich crimson silk curtains, the thick Turkey carpet, the many wax lights, the marble bath, with hot and cold water obedient to a turn of the finger, the choice engravings on the wall, the crackling cheerful fire, and the large handsome mirrors, reflecting all this luxury, form an *ensemble* inexpressibly agreeable to the beautiful sybarite.

"Life is enjoyable enough with these adjuncts," she says, as she arranges the thick coils of her magnificent hair. Truly no maid in the world could have better preserved the Grecian contour of that head than its fair owner has done. Never have those mirrors reflected anything more beautiful than Clara, when her toilette was finished.

Her father knocked at the door. "Are you ready, Clarry?" he said. "May I come in?" and Algy, inducted into his tightest evening dress, presented himself.

"I call this something like," he cried, rubbing his hands. "'Gad, it suits my complaint to a T. My cousin Shorthorn has not a better establishment. A pompous butler, two powdered flunkies, the black valet, and buttons. I took them all in at a glance, as we stood in the hall. By Jove! you are handsomer than ever to-night, *ma belle;*

you are dressed *à merveille.* I don't think much of that little filly of Harding's."

"Yes, you do," said his daughter; "you are too good a judge of beauty not to admire her. Elle est gentille à croquer. We need not waste any lies on that subject."

"She would put her backers a very long way in the hole if you entered for the stakes against her," said Algy. "Why, you are as big again as she is."

"If beauty be estimated by the number of its inches," replied Clara, with a smile, "I should certainly win in an easy canter, as you would say. That is the dinner-bell," she added, as the sonorous peal went through the house.

"We shall have no end of a feed," said her father. "Harding keeps a French cook. If we could only fix ourselves here *en permanence*, Clarry! The worst of it is we are only just tolerated visitors," he continued, ruefully.

"Gather the rosebuds while ye may," sang Clara, gaily. "The champagne sparkles now; *buvons*, it is the best of all philosophy."

"I must go and do the attentive," said Algy, "and arm your mother down stairs. She was in a bad mood when I left her."

Mrs. Silvester has attired herself in a plum-coloured moiré; her pale hair is carefully braided beneath a rich blonde cap. She has added this head-dress since her husband left her, and she considers it so very becoming that her face looks quite amiable by reason of her self-satisfaction.

She is a little overwhelmed with Plush and Powder at dinner—you know it is many years now since she has been so waited upon. Algy and his daughter adapt themselves easily to their position.

"Miss is a fine gal, but huppish," is the verdict of the servants' hall. Zoé and Madame can scarcely withdraw their eyes from the beautiful girl who moves with such queenly grace in the large rooms.

"We have very little amusement to offer you in this Sahara of ours, Clara," said Mr. Harding. "No fêtes, no balls. My little girl is only just emancipated from the school-room. She is satisfied with her prison walls as yet; but I expect her to complain in a short time. There are many young ladies in the neighbourhood, but the rougher sex is in a fearful minority. By the way, I understand Rose Cottage has a new inmate. Have you seen Miss Snowe's nephew, Madame?" he said, addressing that lady.

I am very glad he did not direct his question

to Zoé, for the little maid was blushing to the roots of her hair.

Clara regarded her closely. "The silly fly is meshed already," she thought, scornfully.

Madame was quite eloquent in her praise of Horace Snowe.

"I will call upon him to-morrow, and ask him to join us at dinner. I will also invite the Reverend Archibald," said the master of Beck-lands. "I shall expect you young ladies to give us a concert afterwards. You will have to practise, Zoé. Clara is an admirable musician."

Indeed, she was well entitled to her uncle's praise. She was a perfect mistress of both the harp and piano.

Stolen fruit is said to be the sweetest. Possibly the same rule applies to a stolen education. Clara's had been robbed from hard-working women and needy professors, and yielded a far finer flavour than Zoé's legally obtained and honestly paid for.

* * * *

"You sing Spanish songs, I see," said Clara, looking up from the portfolio she was examining, late in the evening of her arrival, when she, her cousin, and Madame were alone.

"Spanish is as much my native language as

English," replied Zoé. "You know I have lived the greater part of my life in South America."

"I know nothing of the kind, señorita," said Clara, smiling. "Never was any one more lamentably ignorant of the antecedents of a newly-found cousin than I am; you must tell me some particulars," she added, seating herself close to Zoé on the sofa. "Commence at once, Mademoiselle la Raconteuse."

"Shall I begin after the fashion of Robinson Crusoe: I was born of respectable parents?"

"Ça va sans dire," said Clara, "et puis?"

"Mamma died when I was very young. She was a Peruvian. My earliest recollections are associated with my kind friend here," and she took Madame's hand in hers.

Madame kissed her pupil "*avec effusion.*"

Clara regarded this interruption a little disdainfully.

"Your papa was with you, I suppose," she continued.

"Not always; he had the management of some mines in Mexico, which kept him from home for months together. We lived at Lima very quietly after mamma died. I cannot make out an interesting story for you, as you see."

"You have been in England four or five years, have you not?" demanded the inquisitor.

"Yes, when grandpapa died we quitted Lima, and soon after we arrived in England we settled here. It was so amusing, Clara. When we first came, Farnorth sent us to Coventry. As soon as papa was successful we became quite popular."

"Do you like any of the natives?" enquired her cousin.

"Some of them very much indeed. I have two very dear friends who live at Rose Cottage, a short distance from here."

"The aunts of the martial hero who is to grace your table to-morrow?"

Zoé nodded, and continued speaking rather hurriedly.

"Miss Mary Snowe," she said, "is still very lovely, and *so* good."

Her cousin curled her lips, as though she could very well have dispensed with this latter qualification.

"I don't like good people," she said; "they are always stupid."

[The beauty indulged freely in this species of candour—it was very effective. "Clara never

pretends to be better than she is," her young companions say.]

Zoé smiled.

"Indeed, it is quite true," said her cousin; "since my youth upwards I have held the same opinion. There is not the shadow of a doubt that everything in this world that is nice is naughty, and *vice versâ*. To be good is *not* to be happy, whatever the copy-books may say; but I must not infect you, sweet innocence, with my wicked principles. Do you keep late hours here? I am very sleepy."

"Pray don't stand on any ceremony, Clara," said Zoé. "I hope you will sleep well; and I do hope poor papa will have a good night," she added, with a sigh.

"Does he not sleep well?" said Clara, with far more eagerness in her manner than she had shown during the last few minutes.

"He is a wretched sleeper; sometimes he will walk backwards and forwards the whole night long."

"What a miserable state of things. Has he been always the same?"

"Ever since I can remember. He is always the worst after a journey; more particularly a sea

voyage. I cannot bear to hear the mention of Paris."

The listener is wide awake now. Has she come to the first bent twig already?

"Paris! He has friends there probably."

"Not friends exactly. Papa is very anxious to extend his French connection; and he has had great difficulty about some contract with a Monsieur Ferné. I believe his last visit was successful; so I do hope we shall have no more of the Straits of Dover."

Clara's interest has quite died out.

"Pshaw!" she said, impatiently; "mere business worry."

Zoé stared at the speaker's tone. Clara recovered herself, apologised for her *brusquerie*, and bade her cousin an affectionate good night.

"Her babyship knows nothing," was her decision when she was once more alone. "She is not one to keep a secret. What is the ghoul this man rises in the night to feed, as Amina did? Shall I ever trace it?" and she was lost in reverie for some time.

The good influence of the blonde cap soon faded away. Mrs. Silvester was herself again the next morning. She complained so bitterly of

her sufferings, that Zoé in alarm called in Dr. Banques. The worthy gentleman gave a most favourable opinion of the invalid's case. "Not the slightest symptom of organic disease I can confidently assure you, madam," he said to the anxious patient. "Nothing in the world but a little indigestion," and he concluded with some learned remarks about the "gastric juices, abnormal action of the diaphragm," &c. &c.

This comforting assurance only diverted the lady's complaints back again into the old channel. A new auditor was a boon to her, and she so deluged poor Zoé with her woes, that the little girl, in spite of her good nature, was not disposed to contradict Clara, when that young lady, with her usual candour, declared "Mamma was the most tiresome creature on the face of creation."

Mr. Harding did not forget his promise to call at Rose Cottage and invite the soldier. Horace Snowe very willingly accepted that invitation; so likewise did the Reverend Archibald when he received a similar summons.

Sword and Gown arrive together. The tall soldier looks remarkably handsome. He is not in the least bashful, and his chivalrous manner with women is particularly insinuating. Haughty

Clara descends from her stilts and talks to the red-coat. The Reverend Archibald does not altogether enjoy himself; he feels somehow impressed with a sense of his personal insignificance. He is nobody this evening. None care whether he throws the handkerchief to them or not. It is a new part for him to play, and one that he does not like. He glares savagely at Horace, and scowls at the *nonchalant* ease of the hero. He smiles bitterly as the soldier relates that fight with a tiger in India. "I'll be bound the fellow was in no end of a funk," his Reverence, who has not forgotten his college slang, murmurs. The good-looking curate has lorded it grandly you know at all the tea fights in Farnorth, and he votes this evening slow, as he subsides into stereoscopic views, and talks learnedly about conic sections to Algy, who, not understanding a word, is scarcely altogether felicitous in his answers.

Sword is unconscious of frowns from Gown, and, devoted worshipper of beauty as he is, enjoys himself to the utmost. Clara's rich contralto notes fill the large room, and melt the hearts of her listeners. How magnificent she looks as she draws those full chords from the harp. The

graceful white arms wreathe themselves round the instrument. Her lovely face seems lit with inspiration. "I never in my life saw any one more gloriously beautiful," Zoé hears the soldier say, and she feels a sinking at the heart, for which she bitterly reproaches herself. "Surely I am not envious?" the poor child says. "What is this new feeling crawling about me?"

Clara discussed the guests, in her own fashion, when they had departed.

"The soldier is well-mannered and well-informed," she said; "moreover, he is very handsome, which is in itself a recommendation. Your man of peace is decidedly objectionable," she added.

"Did you speak to him?" said Zoé, with a smile.

"Not one word, *petite cousine;* but I heard some of his remarks, and through small openings you may see extensive prospects—I quote Miss Edgeworth. The man is a conceited puppy."

"He is a very great favourite amongst the young ladies of Farnorth," said Zoé.

"Probably; in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king."

"You are very severe, Clara; I am afraid we

neglected his Reverence," said Zoé, rather dolefully.

"Never distress yourself about *that*, little one," said her cousin; "if we lopped off one head from his vanity this evening, the hydra will spring again to-morrow. How long has the red-coat been making *les beaux yeux* at you, *ma belle?*" she added suddenly."

"I don't understand you," said poor little Zoé, blushing painfully.

"Yes, you do, *petite.* Happy little girl! you are possessed of a talisman which commands success."

"What *do* you mean, Clara?"

"You have the golden wand, which makes age and ugliness more powerful than youth and beauty. You have the magic charm which christens vice, virtue; and dubs deformity lovely."

Zoé felt as if she could very well have dispensed with this *prestige.*"

"You will have worshippers by the dozen," continued her cousin; "they will swear they adore you for yourself alone. Poor little lambkin! it is your golden fleece these wolves will covet."

"I do not believe men could be capable of anything so contemptible, "said Zoé indignantly; "I

will not believe they would sell their truth and barter their honour for——"

"Oh, Moses and green spectacles!" cried Clara. "What Arcadian simplicity! There is positively an aroma of newly mown hay about you, little Zoé. I dare say you believe there are Jacobs living in these days who would patiently serve fourteen years for the bride of their affections. Bah! the men in this year of grace may fall in love with Rachael, but they will jilt her and marry Leah, if the weak-eyed elder sister be better portioned. I have chattered your roses away child; good night; may your dreams be happy."

"I have made Mademoiselle Dives sufficiently uncomfortable," said Clara to herself, as she sank back in her luxurious *bergère*. "I meant to do so—are all the sweets of life to be hers?" she added bitterly. "The silly baby has lost her heart to this soldier already; well—" a slight shadow fell over the beautiful face of Algy's daughter, but she did not utter any more of her thoughts aloud.

CHAPTER XI.

THE intelligent reader has already, I am convinced, drawn sage conclusions *in re* that portrait of a fair girl, which has latterly been added to the collection of pictures adorning the walls of Rose Cottage. The maiden ladies have not chosen to gratify the curiosity of Farnorth callers. Zoé Harding knows this painting is tabooed ground. Miss Alathea, when too closely pressed by tactless inquisitors, has dressed truth in rather equivocal garments; but no mystery has been observed with Horace Snowe. The soldier knows very well it is the likeness of his dead young mother, Emmeline Snowe. Hers is a sad story, whether unmixed or not with shame and guilt heaven only knows!

Steam was in its infancy, and scarcely a line of rail laid in any part of the United Kingdom, when Admiral George Snowe purchased some property in Grand Crag, North Devon, and brought his three young daughters to live with him in the

pretty cottage on his estate. The old sailor had seen plenty of active service; had given one limb to his country, and very much crippled the others. A greater martinet had never trod the quarter-deck; and when he retired on full pay, he carried his tyrannical propensities into his domestic circle. He had no son, and his wife being dead, lucky woman! his three poor girls were the sole victims of his cantankerous humours. Alathea was several years older than the other two. She had some influence with her father, and she contrived to adapt herself pretty well to the whims of the savage old disciplinarian. Mary's sweet temper made her ductile in his hands, but Emmeline, his youngest child, was pretty nearly always in a chronic state of mutiny; she developed gout in her father's system more persistently than the quantity of port wine and strong grog he daily drank. Alathea was, even in those days, an incipient *bas bleu*, and, in nursing her scientific bantlings, found some consolation for her father's daily bullyings. Mary was permitted to indulge her passion for tending the sick and suffering, so that her time did not hang heavy on her hands; but poor Emmeline, who was neither a scholar nor a saint, chafed in her bondage. The two younger girls were both eminently beautiful, even

the rigid sumptuary laws enforced by old Neptune could not conceal their extreme loveliness. The fame of their beauty spread far and wide, the more so, perhaps, from the mystery of their excessive seclusion. They were not permitted to join in any of the amusements of their young neighbours. If the old man of the sea had been a Roman Catholic, he would most assuredly have immured his three girls in a convent; as it was, he carried his parental powers up to its utmost limit—a daily walk with him was their most lively recreation. The young mutineer sometimes broke through bounds, and was *en penitence* for days together for surreptitious lonely wanderings. The sisters were all very fond of each other, but the attachment between the two youngest was something wonderful. If Emmeline ever submitted to her stern father's rules and regulations, it was through gentle Mary's influence.

Admiral Snowe, arbitrary old savage though he was, had, however, his heel, and it was this one weakness of his which formed the nucleus of that grim skeleton which most assuredly killed him, and which has darkly shadowed the whole of his two elder daughters' lives. The gruff sailor considered himself a great connoisseur in the fine arts, his *spécialité* was his taste in paintings.

This was, as most of his acquaintances knew, his most vulnerable part. He had spent a great amount of money at different times on this hobby—money he could not in the least afford to waste, as he was considerably embarrassed with debts incurred many years ago.

When Mary was eighteen, and Emmeline about seventeen years of age, the old man, their father, one day received a note from an artist, who had been staying some little time at Grand Crag. He was a complete stranger, no one knew anything about him; but the Admiral and his daughters had frequently passed him in their daily walks. This gentleman, Mr. James Smith, opened the communication with an apology for intruding himself on the Admiral's notice, but he had heard of that gentleman's taste in matters of fine art, and he should feel greatly gratified if he might be permitted to submit to the judgment of so excellent a critic some sketches he had made of views in the neighbourhood. The paintings were not for sale, the artist said, he was anxious only for a verdict of approval. The old sailor's vanity was mightily tickled by this diplomatic epistle, and he wrote a civil assent, appointing a meeting at Trafalgar Cottage for the next morning. The artist was punctual; he was a very handsome

young man, with easy manners. Infinite tact also must Mr. James Smith have possessed, for, though obsequiously civil to the master of the house, he utterly ignored the presence of his three daughters. The Admiral was charmed with his visitor, and gave the sketches the stamp of his unqualified approval. The acquaintance thus commenced ripened into intimacy, and Mr. James Smith was solicited to give lessons in his art to the three young recluses. This he at first refused to do, but upon being pressed on the subject, he finally consented. Some weeks passed. A great change for the better was observable in Emmeline's general conduct. She was rarely *en penitence* now. There was a light in her eyes, and a bright bloom on her cheek, which made her more beautiful than ever. She devoted herself with the greatest industry to her new pursuit; but neither she nor her sisters made any great progress. Admirable artist though Mr. James Smith's paintings proclaimed him to be, he, like many other good artists, did not possess the gift of imparting his powers to those he instructed.

All, however, went merry as a marriage bell, until one unlucky day, when a good-natured neighbour called and informed the Admiral that his daughter Emmeline had been seen walking

with the artist in one of the least frequented parts of the district! Thunder and lightening followed. The criminals were hauled up to justice. A court martial held; Mr. James Smith dismissed with a volley of oaths and curses, and the feminine culprit locked up on bread and water for days. She was only liberated on parole when the artist's departure from Grand Crag was officially confirmed. Emmeline was an altered being when she emerged from her prison. She no longer mutinied; her spirit seemed quite broken, her bloom faded. She submitted to her father in everything, and the gratified tyrant gloated over his conquest, and relaxed his discipline a little. One morning a great wail arose throughout Trafalgar Cottage. Emmeline was missing! The Admiral cursed, and stamped, and swore, but all his noise could not find her. No one dare whisper their suspicions, but at first a dumb horror prevailed that the child had destroyed herself. The silent agony of the poor sisters I will not attempt to describe. This great dread was removed by a rumour, subsequently confirmed by the good-natured neighbour, that a veiled lady, in figure very much resembling the youngest Miss Snowe, had filled a place in the High Flyer coach, which left Grand Crag at five

o'clock that morning. Foaming Neptune started immediately in hot pursuit; but returned in a few days without the runaway. The driver of the High Flyer gave the following information. The veiled lady had been joined by a gentleman at the first large town where the coach stopped to change horses; he accompanied her a part of the way, and then they both got down and entered a carriage, which with four horses was waiting for them. In what direction they drove the deponent could not say. The Admiral stormed, and stamped, and swore himself into a fit, from which he never recovered. The old pagan died, savagely cursing his unhappy daughter.

Very little of this world's goods remained to the poor girls after the death of their father. His income of course died with him, and what property he left was considerably encumbered with debt. They would not however part with the cottage. If their lost dove should ever return to her home, the nest would be ready to receive her. For days, and weeks, and months, their search after her was incessant; they spent two-thirds of their income in fruitless enquiries. A little more than a year after her flight a letter, written in a strange hand, arrived for Mary Snowe. Its contents entreated the ladies, if they wished to see their

sister Emmeline alive, to lose no time in hastening to the address given—some lodging-house in the West-end of London. Half-an-hour after the receipt of the letter Alathea and Mary left Grand Crag. They travelled night and day. When they arrived at the house in London, they were met by the landlady of the apartments. Her first words pierced with sharp agony the hearts of the weary miserable girls. Their sister was dead! She had died in giving birth to an infant, whose plaintive, feeble cry was the first sound which fell on the sisters' ears when they entered the room where its young mother lay. Ah me! what bitter scalding tears were shed over that poor senseless form—lovely even yet, with more than mortal beauty. The prim mistress of the house was moved by the sufferings of the mourners. She was a handsome woman, this landlady, but there was something sinister in her face. She had only one attendant, a Belgian, to whom English was an unknown tongue. Madam of the apartments was eagerly anxious to communicate all the particulars she was able to give to the sisters; but her words threw no light on the black mystery which to this day shrouds the memory of Emmeline Snowe. Three weeks ago, the landlady said, a gentleman—who, from her description,

exactly corresponded with the artist, Mr. James Smith—had hired her apartments for a lady. He was accompanied by this lady on his second visit; she was the unhappy girl now lying dead. They brought very little luggage with them. The gentleman remained two or three days with the lady and then left her. She appeared tolerably cheerful, and occupied herself with preparations for her expected baby. A fortnight after her arrival the gentleman's friend or servant—the landlady was unable to decide which of the two he was—called and made some communication to her lodger, which so affected her that she was thrown into violent convulsions. The friend, or servant, before leaving, gave the landlady some money, as also the address of the sisters, entreating her to write to them at once. The poor lady never recovered her senses: she was taken with the pangs of premature labour, and died three days after her first seizure. It was the landlady's opinion that the gentleman had deserted the poor young thing, and the friend, or servant, had broken the intelligence to her: the shock had resulted in the death of the victim. There was no wedding-ring on the slight finger of the dead girl, and the unhappy sisters were left to draw the worst conclusions from this sad fact. The mortal

remains of Emmeline Snowe lie buried far away from her Devonshire home. The two weeping girls left London, carrying with them the poor deserted little orphan. The landlady was unwearied in the enquiries she made afterwards, but nothing more was ever heard of Mr. James Smith and his friend. Alathea and Mary Snowe did not return to Grand Crag. They disposed of the cottage and estate there, and lived in different parts of England, until chance carried them to Farnorth. With their subsequent history the reader is already acquainted.

CHAPTER XII.

Never since the accession and coronation of our Good and Gracious Queen, had Farnorth so arrayed itself as on this, the 1st day of February, 185–. Triumphal arches, built of prickly holly and evergreens, liberally supplied from most of the gardens in the district, spanned the entrance to, and egress from the town. Bright-coloured flags fluttered from every pinnacle where they could very well be hoisted. One or two of the clubs walked. The children from the national and infant schools, dressed in their Sunday best, paraded the streets; two cannons, which had silently lived in retirement from time immemorial, were dragged from obscurity, placed in the most prominent position (the muzzle of one showed from the tower of the parish church), and made to utter thunder and belch forth white smoke the whole day long. The shops were all closed, and a universal holiday prevailed. And why? The monarch of Farnorth is this day to return to the

long-deserted home of his ancestors. Vassals and serfs have already arrived; upholsterers and house-decorators have been busy for months. Foxcroft has emerged from its chrysalis state, and expands its butterfly wings. Domestic kine no longer browse on the aristocratic turf of Plantagenet Park. Those unsightly wire fencings are removed. The king shall enjoy his own again. A crowd of worshippers will meet Monseigneur at the railway station. It is whispered that some of these adorers will act, for this day only, as beasts of burden; human strength and human sinews will drag his majesty's carriage through the town of Farnorth. Sir Mortimer Plantagenet's baronetcy dates from the earliest creation, and his ancestors were knights and squires of high renown long before the advent of the first James. If you will walk into the large picture-gallery at Foxcroft you will there see a goodly array of family portraits: knights in armour; long waisted, very *décolletée* beauties; and their bearded cavaliers. The lovely Winifred Plantagenet occupies a prominent position. She lived in the early part of the fifteenth century, and the Mrs. Grundy of her day cackled not a little about her; but she died in the odour of sanctity, and was buried in the sacred cemetery of the Convent of Sancta Magda-

lena, whose abbess she was. Take notice also of the fierce-looking cavalier with the peaked beard, who scowls upon you from the top of the room. He was a favourite knight and attendant upon the Lion King, Richard, to whom he was distantly related; he distinguished himself in the Holy Wars, and slew more Saracens and Turks than there are days in the year. Leave the picture-gallery and look in upon the large dining-hall. Its walls are made glorious by the works of Reynolds and Laurence. Observe how skilfully these great artists wrestled with the hideous dress of the period. I have mentioned before that a portrait of the first gentleman in Europe occupies the post of honour. Flanking the 'Wreck of the Royal George' are pictures, life-size, of the late Baronet and of Lady Marguerita, the first wife of *son Altesse.* She was of the most noble house of Overall; a tall, stately looking woman must her ladyship have been, with perhaps a little too much bone for fastidious eyes, but thoroughly patrician notwithstanding. You may trace the aristocratic line in the Overall nose, which is high and *bien prononcé.* No wonder the Plantagenets reigned absolute monarchs of Farnorth. No wonder Farnorth prostrates itself down to the ground to do honour to its sovereign's return from exile.

Giles Houndly, Esq., of Gothic Hall, is one of the prime movers in all these loyal demonstrations. He convened the first meeting, and now his white hat may be seen waving ubiquitously all day long. Some of the inhabitants of the district hold themselves sulkily aloof. These rebels are of the Liberal party—rank democrats and levellers, without a spark of the good old Tory spirit. These wicked Tells would have refused obeisance to the cap of Gessler. Why all this fuss? the malcontents say. What good have the Plantagenets ever done to Farnorth? Did they benefit the trade of the town when they reigned, years ago? I am obliged to confess they did not. They rarely dealt with our local shops, and what they did order was never paid for. Of course they subscribed to the charitable institutions, and were bountiful with largesse to the poor of the neighbourhood, William Tell sarcastically observes. I cannot say so—Jones, the retired grocer, gives away more money in charity in a month than the Plantagenets gave in a year, and yet I don't think one of the inhabitants of Farnorth would harness himself to the good man's gig. Was the last king a virtuous monarch? is the final enquiry of the rebels. Again candour demands a negation.

A more profligate old pagan than the late Sir

Mortimer Plantagenet Plantagenet never wore out shoe leather. His majesty of Foxcroft had every vice of the Regency period, and we all know how plentiful the crop was during that harvest. The Lady Marguerita was dragged through a slough of degradation by the well-born monarch—she could have obtained a decree in the divorce court fifty times over had she been so minded. Her present ladyship, *née* Brown, had plenty of reason to deplore the change of her humble patronymic. After she met with that accident to her spine, her noble husband showered contempt upon her, and treated her shamefully. His reckless extravagance has so crippled the property that I doubt whether it will ever recover. He dissipated his daughters' fortunes, for which he was trustee during their minority, and has left the poor ladies almost dependent on their brother. Farnorth has woven a romance that his death was hastened by the loss of his eldest son. Bah! his quarrels with his firstborn were public property. He drank more deeply when the news first arrived; but the catastrophe did not shorten his days one hour. He led the same infidel life up to the time of his death. You might see his padded figure, his purple-dyed head, and his wicked, leering old face, at any of the

fashionable watering-places on the continent for years after he left Farnorth and was supposed to be dying of a broken heart. The only benefit he ever conferred on society was on that day when he was impotent to resist the fit which finally choked him. [Our parish church was hung with mourning for several Sundays afterwards.] Of Monseigneur, the present Baronet, I can only say that, if all reports be true, he is a dutiful son in planting his feet in the footprints of his deceased father.

The church bells ring out a yet merrier peal, the cannons boom, the loud huzzas of the multitude draw nearer and nearer. The crowd surges, and a lane is made; the bray of the brass band has significance now—"The Conquering Hero comes." Twenty Farnorthites are harnessed to the car of triumph, the leaders pant with their exertions, it is a stiff rise from the station. In the middle of High Street the procession halts, the cheers are deafening. Mr. Giles Houndly's hat is wonderful in its gyrations, "his brow is wet with honest sweat," the buttons of his ample waistcoat have but a slender tenure on existence. Sir Mortimer rises to address the crowd; he is tall and slight, and the ladies vote him charming. You can see the contour of his cheeks, for he has

no whiskers; he looks younger than he is by reason of this abnormal smoothness. His white teeth glisten beneath the dark silky moustache which shades his upper lip. He flings bouquets of smiles to all the pretty girls; the Snowdrop of Farnorth has to gather up many nosegays. His lady mother lies back in the carriage; she has never recovered from that accident to her spine. Mental and physical pain have laid their heavy hands upon her, there is scarcely any trace of lovely Nelly Brown in her pale haggard face. Edward Sparkles is straining his eyes eagerly to look at her. Ah me! how that faded woman had wrung the lawyer's honest heart in the days long gone by. How many weary, slow, trailing days, how many fevered, restless nights were passed, how many scalding tears were shed, how many prayers to the Almighty uttered, before that unworthy love perished of atrophy, and was buried in the past, wounded vanity acting as grave-digger! No friendship sprang from those ashes. Do we ever forgive the man or woman who has betrayed us? I think not.

The slow consuming fire which has burnt out her ladyship's beauty, has greatly purified her inner nature; she is as unlike in feeling as she is in appearance now to the giddy thoughtless girl

who queened it so haughtily during the first three years of her brilliant marriage. She is passionately fond of her son, and his affection for her is the one slight golden vein in the base clay of his nature. She is kind to her unmarried step-daughter, and shields her as well as she can from the cruel stabs of Sir Mortimer, when that gentleman is disposed in his playfulness to make a pincushion of the poor lady. He indulges very freely in this amusement, as he is not in the slightest degree troubled with delicacy of feeling; the hippopotamus is scarcely more devoid of this weakness than he.

Miss Winifred Overall Plantagenet is the second child of the late baronet. Her only sister Marguerita married a German baron ten years ago; she was much handsomer than her eldest sister. Miss Plantagenet is an elderly woman now; she has the bone and high features, as well as the blood, of the noble house of Overall. Time has not scattered his snow on her pale Saxon hair; but he has sadly thinned the partings. She sits coldly unmoved in the midst of all this excitement. There is no salt in this woman's life—it is vapid and tasteless. Romance hovered its bright wings over her youth; but it took the shape of her brother's tutor, and flew away from

the loud blast of parental indignation. Her lover is Dean of Northminster now; his name is great in clerical circles. I think Miss Winifred would have been happier with him even in his poverty, than stagnating thus in dreary splendour, and I know she holds the same opinion.

Sir Mortimer is addressing the crowd; but his words are well nigh drowned in the tumult. His head is uncovered, he has dark, curling hair, which he has not offered up to the Moloch of fashion. His features are regularly handsome, he has inherited the beauty for which his mother was remarkable, and which won her such a brilliant position; but he has not a good face. His movements are all studied, he poses himself in most elegant attitudes, he passes his white fingers through his fine hair, and bows gracefully to the admiring multitude. The Farnorth beauties are in ecstasies with him, even Horace Snowe's sun sets temporarily, and the Reverend Archibald Middleton is permanently thrust into the shade. Sir Mortimer is a lady-killer, you know; Mrs. Bland announced that fact before he came. He has attained marvellous skill in this species of slaughter; the headsman was not more dexterous in lopping off cabbage stalks than this noble executioner. He has broken more hearts and

vows than any man of his age in Europe. He carries about the locks of hair of his victims as the Red-skin does the scalps of his foes; he shows them as proofs of his prowess. He is altogether contemptible, tinsel, sawdust, and rags, and the ladies adore him. Is it the savage alone who worships his fetish? It seems to me some clumsy wooden idols are niched in sacred places in this our Christian land.

I have said the young Baronet was a dutiful treader in the footsteps of his deceased father. I am not going to sully these pages with more special reference to his vices. I shall treat only of drawing-room conquests, of misery inflicted on youthful hearts, of cruel wounds to self-love. Were I the father of a family I would rather lock up my daughters for life than admit this handsome wolf into my fold. What grievous havoc he makes among the tender lambkins! He will select the youngest and fairest, he will whisper his lies in her ear, and shower devotion upon her, day after day, evening after evening. He will waste a wealth of energy in pursuit until the child's heart be won, *et puis?* Insolent coldness, deadly stabs, studied neglect, shrugs of the shoulder, and Monsieur boasts to his friends of his conquest, votes it a bore, and nobody kicks him!

Sir Mortimer has finished speaking. There is a slight flush on his mother's cheek, her eyes are bright, the ghost of her dead beauty sweeps over her ladyship's face as she looks at her boy. Monseigneur seats himself, and the *cortège* moves. Human leaders and wheelers strain their sinews, but the worst part of their toil is over, the road is level now they are nearing Plantagenet Park! Rose Cottage is quite close to patrician Foxcroft. Its inmates have not joined the loyal subjects in their welcome to their sovereign—they, and the Becklands' people, are of the rebel party. Horace Snowe is smoking a cigar in the spinster ladies' garden when the procession passes; he removes the weed from his lips and stands for a few moments at the gate. The sun is shining now, and its bright rays light up the fine figure of the Indian hero. Miss Winifred looks rather earnestly at the tall, handsome soldier; even maidens of fifty-three are not indifferent to good looks. Sir Mortimer's eyes fall in the same direction, and the monarch frowns as he sees the rebel's cap unlifted. He flings different bouquets this time to those the Farnorth belles have gathered, and the compliment is returned with interest. Horace is in a different way quite as haughty as my lord. I do not think any great

friendship will ever exist between these two men.

An arch of evergreens spans the entrance to the lovely undulating park. Flags, bearing the Plantagenet arms (Gules, a fess argent in chief, three torteaux of the second), are hoisted at each side. The crest of this noble house is a sprig of the broom proper, bearing the Norman motto, "Si je veux je peux." The old gate-keeper, and his white-haired wife, come forward to do homage. There is something genuine and respectable in the moisture which dims the eyes of the venerable couple as they advance to greet their feudal lord. A pleasant light flitters over Miss Winifred's face as she takes the withered hands in her delicately gloved palms, and speaks a few kind words to the loving dependents. The affectionate devotion of old servants who have lived with you from your infancy has something infinitely touching in its simplicity. The pallid, worn woman, who holds their hands in hers, will never grow old in the eyes of these faithful servitors. Have they not held her in their arms, and listened with reverent delight to her baby prattle? She is invested with the halo of perpetual youth to them, and they will speak of her as their eldest "young lady" to the day of their death.

Sir Mortimer does not offer *his* hand to his vassals; he does not deign to vouchsafe more than the ghost of a smile in acknowledgment of their tribute. He is impatient at the delay, and speaks a few words to his elderly half-sister, which tinge her thin cheek with a faint colour. Leaders and wheelers break into a sharp trot. On, on, through the green park; all semblance of tune vanishes from the bray of the brass band with the rapid motion. The screams and shouts become louder and louder; the caws of provident rooks, discussing their domestic arrangements, are drowned in the clamour. On, on, through the wide avenue; the hoar-frost has melted on the evergreens, bright drops glisten on their leaves, and bedew the hard ground. The Foxcroft mansion looms in sight. Leaders and wheelers relax their speed—it is time they did, the perspiration streams from the noble beasts. The shouts of the crowd reach their apex, the band recovers its breath, "Home, sweet Home," resounds through the air. Serfs in powder and plush, and silken gowns, reverently bend and curtsey to the ground in the large portico. The young monarch descends, he assists his mother, she is unable to walk, vassals and serfs advance and bear the poor lady in their arms; Miss Winifred alights from the car of

triumph as best she can. The royal family bow graciously to their subjects, and sweep through a line of serfs into the palace of their forefathers. "Bring out the foaming tankard: pass the generous wine: it was our fathers' custom, and so it shall be mine." Alas! for the decadence of the present day. Leaders and wheelers, shouters, screamers, and brayers return dry-lipped to their several homes at Farnorth.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Silvesters have been domesticated at Becklands some little time now. Farnorth has done them honour; morning visitors have been very plentiful since their advent. The Plantagenet carriage, with its cream-coloured horses, and its almost regal liveries, has dashed up the avenue leading to the mansion of Theodore Baynes Harding. Lady Plantagenet, and her step-daughter, Miss Winifred, have more than once graced Zoé's drawing-room within the last three weeks; her ladyship has been most condescending, almost caressing, in her manner to the young heiress. The ladies from Becklands have returned these visits, and shivered for half-an-hour in the large morning-room at Foxcroft; but as yet they have not been introduced to Monseigneur the Lord of Plantagenet Park. His majesty is most anxious to make their acquaintance, his lady mother says; but his time has been so fully occupied since his return to the home of his fathers, that he has not had a moment to call his own.

Horace Snowe is now a very frequent guest at Mr. Harding's table. The frank manly bearing of the brave young soldier is acceptable to the grave master of Becklands, and Horace is admitted to an intimacy denied to most of the other residents at Farnorth.

Mr. Giles Houndly does not approve of this arrangement. "Harding must be mad," he says; "does he intend his daughter to marry this red-whiskered giant, sir? Mary Snowe has been deep, *very* deep. I always knew she was artful, with all her methodistical humbug. Her nephew's a wise man, sir, a *re*markably wise man; the more creditable to him, as if all reports be true, ahem! he hasn't inherited the recognised right to wisdom—eh, sir?" he adds maliciously.

Mr. Harding has no intention of marrying his daughter to the soldier, nor indeed to any one else at present. She is still a child in his eyes; it was only the other day she was crying over her broken doll; it never entered his head to imagine that danger might chance to the heart of his child, in this daily intercourse with a handsome, well-informed man. [I don't think fathers ever do calculate the evils likely to result from introducing these wolves into their fold, though they call out lustily enough when the mischief is done.]

Indeed Horace appeared to pay infinitely more attention to Clara than to Zoé, and perhaps the master of Becklands thought that the Indian hero, with the reversion of his maiden aunts' many thousands, would not be altogether a bad match for his beautiful portionless niece. And so the evening concerts went on, and the soldier, who had a well-cultivated voice, sang duets with Clara, and lounged through the spring mornings in the sunny drawing-room, and talked excellent French to Madame, with whom he was a great favourite, and joined the cousins in their sketching excursions, and improved their crude efforts with his master pencil, and thoroughly enjoyed himself, as you may easily believe.

And Clara—is she contented to enjoy the peaceful present; to bask in all this luxurious comfort, careless of the future? Has she abandoned that stealthy search of her's for the mystery which lies hidden in the deep potations, the haggard worn face, the sleepless nights, the weary absent manner of the most fortunate man in Farnorth? No. In the prairie of daily routine, in the forest of social intercourse, in the maze of morning callers, the huntress is ever eagerly looking for the foot-print which is to guide her on her way. After that conversation with her

cousin on the first night of her arrival, she was disposed to imagine that the secret of her uncle's extraordinary depression might perhaps be traceable to some confusion in his affairs. She feared the Midas of the North was not really so prosperous as he was supposed to be. Bankruptcy might be the grim phantom which paled his cheek, drove him to the wine-cup, and chased sleep from his pillow. But this impression was speedily removed by her father. Algy had made frequent visits to the Weasle; he had been underground, and had seen with his own eyes the vast extent, the many heights of workings, of this wonderful California. There was enough ore developed, he said, to last ten years, even at the rate they were daily raising it. Algy had fraternised with the Cornish captain, and learnt all particulars connected with the mine. He had gone into the matter thoroughly, and having a tolerable head for figures, had arrived at such conclusions with regard to his brother-in-law's wealth, as immensely to increase his respect for that lucky Crœsus. "We must stick to him like wax, Clarry," he said to his daughter; "he is the trump card which will win us the odd trick. I like this life, my dear; it may be a trifle slow, but it is confoundedly respectable. The dinners are good, the wine first-rate, and Harding has some

capital nags in his stable. If I could only get him on to the turf—but he has no leaning that way, worse luck," he added lugubriously.

And so Clara continues her watch, and sighs, and loses heart almost, as the bright spring days go by, and she is yet no nearer on her way.

Madame cannot reconcile herself to Zoé's newly-found relatives. You know she was prejudiced against them before they came. She has no reason to complain of a lack of civility; they do not treat her "*comme ménagère.*" Mr. Harding observes a marked courtesy towards his daughter's governess, and his visitors take their tone from him; but Madame chafes at their presence. "These people are not *sympathiques*," she murmurs in the privacy of her chamber. Monsieur's manners were odious to her, Madam wearied her, and Clara—the good lady did not even whisper to the walls what she thought of her. "Elle est d'une rare beauté," she said to Horace Snowe, and then she suddenly rushed to a more congenial subject—rapturous praise of her pupil. "My *petite* is beautiful as well," she said, "but one finds in her also a heart tender and compassionate, which renders more precious yet the gifts *que lui a départis la nature.*"

I think the remark was a little invidious to Algy's handsome daughter.

Mrs. Silvester is growing almost amiable amidst the luxuries which surround her. It is pleasant enough to have all the advantages of an invalid without any of the evils, and she does not dislike the post assigned her. Dr. Banques attends her daily, and his ingenuity is taxed to find high-sounding names for her many ailments. "Cheerful society, carriage exercise, and a generous diet, my dear madam, are all you require," he says, and his patient takes care to attend to his directions. She revels in the twaddle of morning-callers. I have said Farnorth has done honour to the rich man's relatives. Algernon Charles Silvester's name is glanced at by Barker; you know he is first cousin to a noble viscount, and though my Lord Shorthorn utterly ignores his existence, he cannot efface the relationship. Algy has complained bitterly in these pages, that he might have been a tinker's son for all the good his blood has done him. Hitherto I cannot say it has been of very much advantage to him; but Algy the bankrupt, the swindler, the associate of low blacklegs—Algy, disowned by his aristocratic relatives, and leading a vagabond scrambling life—is altogether a different person to Algernon Charles

Silvester Esq., the guest of his wealthy brother-in-law. Farnorth is disposed to admire, and even imitate, the eccentric manners and conversation of the viscount's first cousin. Algy—advised thereto by his daughter—studiously keeps down his conjugal silver veil in public; but he has sworn he would not suffocate himself with it in private, and he does not. Mrs. Silvester has been savagely warned by her husband to avoid all reference to her life since her marriage, and so she consoles herself with pouring into the ears of obsequious visitors the many triumphs attending that golden period when she was a petted young heiress, with lovers as plentiful as wasps in September. A recurrence to that era of her life—"When I was staying at Woolwich with my maternal grandfather, Sir Theodore Baynes"—was as much to be dreaded, as the celebrated passage of arms at Haflinghem with which the elder Countess of Croye nauseated her friends and acquaintances.

Farnorth is quite overawed by beautiful Clara. The cold, stately politeness of the haughty girl, has a withering effect on the good people. The reader may have observed, that in her conversations with her father, the young lady is more voluble with slang than is altogether becoming; but in her intercourse with the world in general,

the most hypercritical can find nothing in her words or actions but what is essentially graceful and ladylike. Even prejudiced Madame admits that "the elegance of her manners indicates an education *aussi sage que distinguée.*"

Algy's daughter is also an obedient vassal to that tyrannical *Vehme-Gericht* presided over by Mrs. Grundy, and lectures her young cousin roundly, when that little lady is disposed to be rebellious. "A strict regard for *les convenances* is the black mail society levies," she says. "If we refuse the exaction, Smith, Brown, and Robinson, will make a raid upon us, and bear away our reputation in their rieving fingers."

And yet if I remember aright, Miss Silvester had snubbed her mother, when the poor lady had said something about propriety, when they were living in those apartments in Noname Street. "I had no position to maintain *then*," Clara will tell you bitterly.

Zoé would be puzzled to define her exact feelings towards her cousin. No one could more honestly admire this beautiful woman than does the little girl; but the bold scoffing sentiments, so freely expressed by Algy's daughter, scare our rustic innocent. Miss Alathea Snowe has bewailed in Zoé a lack of development in the organ of

causality—the phrenologist has declared that this want is shown in the tendency of her favourite to accept the surface. Clara is always removing the smooth level ground, and revealing to the shuddering child the mouldering bones, the sinks and sewers, the many pit-falls, which lie hidden beneath this fair seeming. She strips off the gay motley, and shows the gangrened festering wound. She tears away the veil of illusion, and points to the paint and tinsel of the gaudy actors who stalk this mortal stage.

"See how the child shrinks from the foot-lights and orange peel," she says. "My innocent Phyllis! you must never leave your flock on the hills. Corydon shall come and tune his pipe in your praise, and, crook in hand, you shall trip it merrily together in Arcadia. Where shall we find Corydon, my unsophisticated cousin?" and she looks keenly at her companion.

Poor Zoé cannot keep down those tell-tale blushes.

"Perhaps he is already found," continues Clara. "Phyllis has flocks and herds, and shepherds are not then difficult to find. My little Zoé, I envy you."

"I am a fit object for envy, truly," says her cousin, rather bitterly; "if I possess, as you say,

the power of purchasing affection, I would rather win one heart than buy a thousand."

"So would not I. Bright eyes fade, rosy cheeks wither, and the influence which has grown out of their beauty vanishes with them; but *les beaux yeux de nos cassettes* never lose their power; they are potent to the end, if your marriage settlements be good. Phyllis must employ clever lawyers. Can she find them in Arcadia? I hope so, or woe betide her flocks and herds. Yes, I repeat it—I envy you, little Zoé. Farnorth is very fond of you, and so am I; but I should not like you so well if you had not a rich father," says Clara, with that candour of her's which is so effective.

Zoé laughs. "You never spare yourself, Clara," she says; "but I am certain you do not believe in your cynical theories."

"I tell you I *do*, and you will live to believe in them too, *ma mie*. At present you shut your eyes and will not see the thorns in your roses. The perfume of your flowers is all sufficient for you; you are pleased with your puppets, and are angry with me for showing you the wires that work them; but some fine day the thorns in your roses will wound you, the wires of your puppets get out of order, and the sawdust and rags reveal themselves, *et puis*, mademoiselle? I shall grow

quite sentimental if I pursue this theme. I hear Dr. Banques' shuffling footsteps in the hall. Mamma must have exhausted the whole catalogue of her ailments, and will not be quite so tiresome for the next half-hour. I must seize the favourable opportunity, as I have promised to walk with her to-day."

Conversations such as these left an unpleasant effect on the little mistress of Becklands. It was in vain the child struggled against their subtle influence. Some of the seeds of distrust, so pertinaciously sown by Clara, found root even in the candid and unsophisticated mind of her young cousin. Algy's daughter did not even spare the maiden sisters in her invidious hints: she did not attack their disinterestedness, after the fashion of Giles Houndly, Esq.; she was far too clever a diplomate for that; but in her praise of them, of which she was lavish enough, Clara contrived to convey inuendoes which Zoé felt without being able to define. "Is it really true, as Clara says? shall I learn to doubt the motives of all who approach me?" she thinks as she finds herself gauging some kind and affectionate words uttered by Mary Snowe.

The gentle recluses of Rose Cottage greatly admire Zoé's beautiful cousin. I think they will

not long remain under this glamour, but at present the elegance of her manners charms them. Miss Silvester is economical of those peculiar sentiments of hers in their presence. She affects an interest in Miss Alathea's studies, and astonishes the *bas bleu* with the extent of her knowledge. The sisters congratulate their dear young friend—her cousin must be such a delightful companion for her; what a happy accident it was that brought about this pleasant union;—and so the duet goes on, and their little listener upbraids herself for her shocking ingratitude in not thoroughly appreciating the blessings of her position. For Zoé cannot deny to herself that she was happier before that night when the snow was lying thick on the hills, the fires burning brightly, and the watch-dog baying its welcome, than she is now.

Clara has not accompanied her mother in her promenade. She has persuaded the good lady to call and pass an hour or two with Mrs. Bland. The widow is the most patient of all Mrs. Silvester's listeners; she does not yawn or try to turn the conversation when the Woolwich triumphs are introduced, as less patient auditors are disposed to do. Algy's wife can maunder away as long as she likes about "my maternal grandfather Sir

Theodore Baynes," and the amiable relict is all smiling attention throughout these long-winded inanities. I think I have mentioned that Mrs. Bland has a proper respect for the exalted in station, and she considers herself not a little honoured by these friendly visits from the wife of a man whose name is in the peerage.

Clara having thus disposed of her mother, is seated with her father in that pleasant sitting-room, which the hospitality of the little *châtelaine* has assigned to her relations.

Algy is not in good spirits. "If we live in this clover much longer," he says dolefully, "I for one shall never be able to endure scant pasturage again."

"I like the silver manger and the gilded oats myself, I must confess," rejoins his daughter.

"'Gad, it's the only kind of stall fit for such a handsome filly; it's a shame you should ever have to turn out of it. And yet, what is to be done? Harding only invited us here on account of your mother's health. That fool Banques swears that her heart is not in the least affected, and it's not a bit of use my saying it is, when he tells her brother it is not. Midas is not overdone with fraternal affection, and no wonder. Maria treated him dooced badly. I think he likes you, Clarry, but

I don't get on over well with him myself; he is such a moody taciturn fellow. By the way, how about the lazaretto? you have not run the leper to earth yet, young lady. I have not much faith in that hidden mystery, *ma belle.*"

"I believe in it more than ever," says Clara, "although I have not as yet found the slightest clue. The rich man is scared by no Frankenstein monster; he is haunted by a dread of the grim majesty of the law."

"By George! Do you really think so, Clarry," cries her father, not a little excited. "'Gad, if he has done anything slippery, and we could only find it out, it might be the making of us; not but what it would be a confoundedly dirty thing to do, I must say," he adds rather ruefully. "Harding has treated us very well, and——"

"Mademoiselle Tartine, his daughter, knows nothing, I am convinced," says Clara, breaking in upon Algy's conscientious scruples.

"If she did, *you* would have extracted it by this time. She is not like you, Clarry; she is not made of the stuff which holds secrets."

"I would throw my very bonnet into the fire, if I thought it knew mine," says Clara, paraphrasing that speech of the most detestable monarch that ever governed France.

"I believe you, my beauty. Chubb and Bramah locks are easier picked than you; but a child might get anything out of Harding's little girl. And that reminds me—I tell you what, Clarry, Midas must look out sharp. I half suspect Miss Zoé has lost her heart to that long-legged fellow who comes here so often. It will be no use her going in for that little game, unless she wishes to be cut off with a shilling——"

"You think my uncle would act the part of the heavy father in a melodrama. I do not; but I don't intend Zoé to marry Horace Snowe."

"You don't intend! 'Gad, Clarry, you speak so earnestly, one might almost suspect you wanted the red whiskers for yourself. I will never give my consent, *ma fille.*"

All Clara's self-control cannot prevent that war of the roses in her cheeks; but Algy, who has spoken at random, does not observe his daughter. She very quickly recovers herself.

"Do not alarm yourself," she says in the old mocking tone. "I have no thought of linking myself to this nameless hero. A bright destiny truly, to follow the camp when my husband goes to the wars, or stay at home and do "Goody" all day long with an imbecile blue-stocking and a methodistical saint; *merci, mon père.*"

"I was only in joke, my dear. With your beauty and talents, you may look for the strawberry leaves. I shall see you wear a coronet yet, Clarry."

"Not if we return to the old vagabond life with its debts and duns. The Gunning days are over. You must have a certain position now, before you can look for matrimonial triumphs. It is too early to dream of coronets and strawberry leaves, we must——"

The entrance of Mrs. Silvester prevented any further confidential parley between the father and daughter.

CHAPTER XIV.

The sun is shining brightly into the large oriel windowed room at Foxcroft. The cold atmosphere of splendour which has chilled morning visitors is dispelled by the warm friendly beam. Serfs in crimson liveries are removing the costly breakfast service; Monseigneur, in an elegant *négligée* toilette, is lolling in an easy chair, discussing the contents of the post-bag. Frowns ruffle his lordship's forehead, as he tears open the envelopes of some suspicious-looking letters. He is high and mighty, we know, but the fairy-ring, which keeps off duns, does not surround Plantagenet Park. Sir Mortimer, after a hasty perusal, crushes the unwelcome reminders in his dainty fingers, and with impartial justice flings the civil, plaintive, and angry appeals alike into the grate to feed the sickly flames, paling and dying in the sun's bright rays. Pink and scented missives, which have hitherto been almost hidden by their coarse companions, now assert their claims to notice. The Baronet does not frown as he masters their contents; a self-

satisfied smile mingles with the contemptuous interjections which occasionally fall from his lips, and he places the flimsy rose-coloured things carefully on one side, before he takes the morning papers in his hands.

The pure mountain air of Farnorth has not yet chased the pallor from my Lady Plantagenet's worn face. She is lying on a couch placed in an embrasure of the window, and the heavy velvet curtains bring out the colourless outline of her features in startling relief. Her large black eyes have a sunken weird look; they tell a tale of more than mere physical suffering. The sad lines about her mouth are eloquent with a dumb misery. Time, alone, has not sown those silver threads so thickly in her hair; her ladyship has barely seen fifty summers, and yet the braids which shadow her deeply-lined forehead, are almost snow-white. She holds a book in her hand and mechanically turns the pages, but you may see the author has no power to arrest his reader's attention—her thoughts are far away.

Miss Winifred Plantagenet is seated near her step-mother. The rays of the sun fall on her pale Saxon hair, which is arranged in a somewhat juvenile fashion. In the whole of this poor lady's appearance, you may trace that persistent struggle

with the inevitable which excites in my heart more of sadness than ridicule. It is so very difficult to accept your *métier*, so very hard to have it forced upon you that your day is over, so very painful to know that you must glide through the rest of your life, a pale shadow, useful only as a background to throw out the charms of younger beauties.

Satirists have darted their fiercest shafts at the honourable Miss Gushington; caricaturists are never weary of attacking the unhappy lady. The vanity which is engrained in smooth skins and bright eyes is tenderly treated, but out upon the monster if it dare to show itself in faded cheeks and scanty tresses. Miss Gushington is lovely Hebe's scapegoat; her lean shoulders feel the cruel scourge, and no one heeds the scalding tears wrung from her poor dim eyes. When years fall upon Joan, she does not shudder at their weight; faithful Darby helps her to bear the burden, and loving young arms support her tenderly on her way. She can endure the loss of youth and beauty, for she still retains those priceless jewels, her husband's and her children's love. But what remains to Miss Gushington? Her life is a blank, barren waste, which she must toil through uncheered and unsustained. If she find some slight anodyne for

her dull pain in those innocent follies of hers, should we not be merciful, and deal gently with her?

Miss Winifred is busy with her embroidery; her white fingers dexterously guide the scissors which cut those symmetrical holes in the calico. I should think she must have finished some miles of this work during the last few years. She is most industrious, but she is no more absorbed in her occupation than her step-mother is in the book which she holds in her hands. Her thoughts are also far away. She is wandering into the past, that bright past, when she was a fair young girl, loving and beloved. How vividly it all returns to her—those walks in the green shrubberies—those stolen meetings in the library. How he loved her—that handsome man, with the vigorous intellect and deep, strong feelings; and oh, how fondly she returned his love! She lingers tenderly over this happy period, and then she recalls that sudden storm when the bright galley went down with its sails full set, and was lost amongst the breakers. She remembers how coarsely her savage father insulted her lover—she remembers the bitter answers, wrung from his pride; and she sees herself, weak, powerless, stunned with all this misery, yielding to the wicked old baronet's cruel

will. Why had she not braved his anger? And the spectre of what might have been, rises, as it has so often risen, to plant another line upon her withered face.

"Winsome Winny is thoughtful this morning," says the mocking voice of the young Baronet. "She has not spoken once during the last half-hour. I have noticed she is much more silent since she paid that last visit to the dentist. I—"

"Will you draw down the blind, Mortimer, and leave off teasing Winifred?" interposes my lady.

"May I not admire her, mother? Did you ever see a more charming toilette than your step-daughter has made this morning? there is the sweet simplicity of eighteen about it. Who would imagine our Winifred had been presented to the fourth George before I was born. Why will you not take example by her, madam, and modify your matronly costume? Look at her coiffure—what childish grace in those fair curls, and such a noble width, too, about the partings."

"My dear boy, how foolishly you run on," says his mother, stirring once more to shield the unhappy victim. "Have you heard anything more of the fancy ball the good people of Farnorth are so anxious about?"

"Yes, it is to be held in the Concert Hall on the

twenty-fifth of this month, and you are to be the Lady Patroness. What costume shall we select for winsome Winny? With those Saxon curls she would make a beautiful Rowena. Had the bride of Ivanhoe the grand *prononcé* nose of your step-daughter, madam? I think not. The bloom has rather deepened there within the last few minutes."

"You talk such absurd nonsense, Mortimer; do be quiet. I wonder whether I shall be expected to wear a fancy dress at this ball: if so, I must decline to patronise it."

"You can wear any dress you like. Farnorth will only be too much honoured if you appear in your morning wrapper. Are you going to leave us, lovely Rowena? Permit me;" and with pretended courtesy, the Baronet rushed to open the door for the badgered woman.

"You really must restrain your teasing propensities, Mortimer. There were tears in your sister's eyes when she left the room."

"Bah! the whining hypocritical old cat: she would scratch if I did not pare her claws. A nice life you must have had with her when you were first married. There would be many a round before the owner of that strong-minded Overall nose threw up the sponge, I know."

"I am afraid we did quarrel a good deal; no doubt there were faults on both sides. You have seen these Becklands people at last; what do you think of the iron man's heiress?"

"*Pas mal;* but there is so little of her—the cousin is superb."

"Very beautiful, but quite portionless I am told. It will not do to lose your heart in that quarter."

"My *spécialité* is to win hearts, not to lose my own. I shall amuse myself with getting up a flirtation with both the fair cousins at the coming ball."

"You naughty boy, you never weary of this cruel sport. Have you no mercy on your victims?"

"Let them look and die," says the Baronet, with all the insolence of the great beau. "If they tumble out of love as quickly as they tumble into it, they will not take much harm. The worst of it is, they hand over their dear little hearts so confoundedly soon, they scarcely give you any sport; but drop down at your feet like sulphured pheasants before you have fired a shot. Preserve me from inspiring another *grande passion.* I have had such a dirge from across the channel this morning;" and the Baronet pointed lazily to one of the rose-coloured parallelograms.

"You have had a letter from Grace Avenel? I am not at all surprised. I know she has told her friends she is engaged to you."

"I dare say she thinks she is, but I have no intention of admitting anything of the kind. She has too much pride to enforce her claims. I shall leave her letters unanswered, and soon wriggle myself out of the house of bondage."

"I cannot call it a very honourable proceeding," says his mother.

"Shut up, my lady! It won't do for *you* to talk about honour. You know how you treated the lawyer when the governor came forward."

"The guide post can point out the right direction, if it does not go the way itself," says her ladyship, slightly blushing. "Is it not just possible Sir Lucius may call you to account?"

"He is too wise a man to compromise his niece by any such insane proceeding. No, my dear mother, Lady Clara Vere de Vere must submit to be jilted quietly; she must grin and bear it. She cannot afford to take any *bourgeois* revenge. You may make your mind easy; Grace Avenel will find some excellent reason to account for the sudden rupture of her engagement."

"I cannot understand how you, with all your discretion, entangled yourself so far."

"Pshaw! I have been solemnly affianced a dozen times at least, and you behold me still a free man. I was rather smitten with Grace at first; there is something *piquante* about her, I am willing to admit, and she was not an easy conquest. Moreover, I fancied she was likely to be much more heavily weighted than she proved to be. You know it was supposed she would come in for her aunt's money; and when the old lady died and left all her savings to the priests, it was quite wonderful how my ardour for her niece cooled. I cannot afford to sell my liberty under a very round sum, of which fact you are very well aware, mother mine. By the way, I have had a most unpleasant letter from Sir Thomas this morning. He wants his money, and threatens to foreclose, and all manner of horrors, if I do not pay up at once."

"Which is simply impossible, I suppose; and the mortgage is on the best part of the estate. What can——"

"Mr. Giles Houndly," Plush and Powder pompously announce.

"Good morning, my lady; ahem! I hope your ladyship will pardon this early visit. Good morning, Sir Mortimer."

Nothing could be more frigid than the reception

extended by the Baronet and his mother to their visitor, but Giles floundered about manfully in the Arctic Ocean.

"I have been deputed by the most influential people in Farnorth to request your ladyship to be the Lady Patroness of the Fancy Ball, which is to be held in the Concert Hall on the twenty-fifth," he said, with as consequential a tone as it was in his power to assume.

"I fancied this matter was finally settled when last I saw you," said the Baronet coldly. "I told you my mother——"

"I know you did, Sir Mortimer," interrupted Giles, who was growing hot and uncomfortable in spite of his efforts. "I know you were kind enough to say so, but naturally we were anxious to receive an answer to our request from her ladyship's own lips. Will your ladyship honour us so far?"

"I am a great invalid, as you know, Mr. Houndly, but if you desire my presence I cannot very well refuse it. You must not expect me to appear in fancy costume."

"Certainly not, my lady, if you do not wish to do so. Wear whatever your ladyship likes, so that you honour us by your patronage at all. The presence of the real aristocracy, my lady, gives a

tone to things of this kind," said Giles, quite himself again now. "It is very pleasing to me to have the genuine good blood in the county again; the Plutocrats have been carrying all before them lately. There is Harding of Becklands, a perfect mushroom, my lady——"

"I have been told he is most respectably connected," interposed the Baronet.

"I have not the least doubt, ahem! he would like you to think so, Sir Mortimer," replied Giles. with a knowing wink; "but if Harding knows who his father was, *that*, I take it, is about the extent of his genealogical knowledge. That imbecile valetudinarian, his sister, is always prating about her maternal grandfather; but no one cares for the blood which comes from the mother's side. Those mule-like pedigrees which ignore the jackass father, won't do for us, Sir Mortimer."

"Mr. Harding has been very fortunate in his mining speculations, has he not?" enquired my lady, in a languid tone.

"That he most certainly has, my lady. It is not more than six years since he first came here, and the quantity of money he must have turned over, I would not trust myself to say. He could buy up the mortgages on all the land about here for miles round; and it would take no small sum

to do that, *you* know, Sir Mortimer," said Giles, viciously thrusting at his host. "His daughter will have plenty of groats, if she has not too much blood; not but what she is as haughty as though she had been descended from the great Incas."

"Was not her mother a Peruvian?" enquired Sir Mortimer.

"So they say. Harding has been twice married. He made a low match the first time, and his father cut him off with a shilling, and left a plum to his daughter, which, as I have found out, her aristocratic husband has managed to lose. After the death of his first wife, Harding went abroad, and there I suppose he picked up number two, who was the mother of Miss Zoé."

"Mr. Harding appears to be a singularly grave and taciturn man," remarked her ladyship, whose icy manner was considerably thawed now.

"Yes, my lady. Harding, during all the years he has been here, has been mute as a mouse about his antecedents. I only heard what I have now told you last week. *You* know what women's tongues are, Sir Mortimer. I beg your ladyship's pardon—there are exceptions of course to every rule. But I was going to say, all my news has been gathered from some crumbs which fell over Mrs. Bland's tea table. Harding's sister made a

long call on the widow the other day, and told her these particulars of the family history; so my authority is very good."

[It was quite true—Mrs. Silvester had given full licence to her tongue at that friendly visit. She had cackled to her heart's content. When Algy came to hear of it he was furious—Mokanna had shown a hideous face to poor Zelica in her dressing-room.]

"Mr. Harding's niece is very handsome," drawled the Baronet.

"Clara Silvester is the finest woman that ever walked God's earth," said Giles with enthusiasm; "and there is something in her, too." [Clara was about the only person I ever heard Giles speak of in really favourable terms. I am certain she might have been the mistress of Gothic Hall, had she been so minded.]

"She does not resemble her father," said my lady.

"Not in the least, though I dare say Silvester has been a good-looking man in his day; there's blood and breed about him—good blood on *both* sides," said Giles, with a second thrust at his host. "Silvester is first cousin to Lord Shorthorn, and his daughter is a regular beauty and no mistake; she throws her little cousin quite into the shade."

"Miss Harding is certainly *mignonne*, but she is

very pretty and distinguished looking," remarked my lady.

"I cannot agree with your ladyship, but I really have no taste for pocket Venuses. Small as she is though, I dare say Harding is ambitious enough for her—he intends her to make a brilliant match you may depend. The owner of the Weasle is a sharp fellow in general. I do not know what he is about to let that soldier walk in and out of his house like a tame dog. He may fancy the red-coat is smitten with his handsome niece, and perhaps he is; but Horace is wide-awake—he will look after the golden prize, or I am very much mistaken."

"I have seen this Horace Snowe several times; who is he?" enquired the Baronet.

"Ahem! *That* question, Sir Mortimer," replied Giles, in his element now, "he would be very much puzzled to answer himself. The spinsters of Rose Cottage came here soon after you went abroad. They brought this Horace with them—he was quite a child. Where they came from, or to whom they belong, no one knows. They have laid themselves open to a great amount of gossip, naturally enough—people will talk you know, my lady—and they say, ahem! but I will not offend your ladyship's ears with what they *do* say; and

now I must really take my leave. Shall we see you on the bench, Sir Mortimer? rather an interesting case going on. No? I am sorry to hear that. Good morning. Good morning, my lady; we may reckon on your patronage?"

Her ladyship bowed haughtily, ignoring Giles's outstretched hand, and that gentleman took his departure.

["An insolent, proud peat her ladyship is, sir," growled Giles to Algy, whom he met in High Street. "My Lady Overall Plantagenet did not give herself more airs and graces than this *parvenue* does. I remember the time when Nelly Brown was friendly enough with me. Her father, old Caleb Brown, was a decent, honest tradesman, sir; he gave you good broad-cloth, and his coats were a perfect fit—he has measured me more than once, and waited on me, sir, hat in hand. If her ladyship thinks I have forgotten the shears and cabbage she is very much mistaken. Farnorth has a tenacious memory, sir. My lady had better not insult it with her presumptuous impertinence, or it may exhume some other little things which the baronet's mother would prefer to remain buried," muttered Giles mysteriously.]

"Houndly is a vulgar, pretentious beast," says his majesty of Foxcroft, when the door had closed

on their loquacious guest. "*He* talk about pedigree, indeed! Why, his grandfather shaved chins at a penny the beard. We must tolerate him though, for he is an excellent medium for conveying to us the gossip of the neighbourhood. I wanted to know some particulars about this new owner of Becklands. If he be really the Crœsus Houndly says he is, what do you say, *madre mia?* shall I cultivate the little heiress his daughter with more serious intentions than *pour m'amuser et faire passer le temps?*"

"But if you have really compromised yourself with Grace Avenel," remonstrated his mother, "you are bound in honour——"

"Pshaw; bound in honour, indeed! Bound in calf-skin rather. Out of what novel have you picked up all this *fâde* sentimental rubbish? I am as free as air, mother. I can destroy what you will so provokingly term my engagement, just as easily as I can these impassioned reminders of it," and so speaking, the Baronet consigns poor Grace Avenel's loving epistles to the same fate which had attended their late vulgar-looking, obnoxious companions in the post-bag.

"It appears there is already a rival in the field, and you have seen him, you say. Is he handsome?"

"That is a matter of taste. *I* do not admire red whiskers."

"*Ni moi non plus;* but this little Spanish girl may not object to them. His profession, too, is an advantage."

"The fellow is only a worm-crusher I believe," yawns Lovelace. "I am rather glad there *is* a rival; it will give piquancy to the affair. I wish I had to besiege *la belle cousine,* instead of this little *provençale.* There would be some credit in winning such a superb creature as Clara Silvester. I am afraid the little heiress will not yield any sport, but drop down at my feet like the rest of my sulphured pheasants. These easy conquests are a bore," sighs his majesty, as he throws himself back in his chair, and complacently strokes his silky moustache.

"It is well your victims do not hear you, Mortimer," says his mother. "When will you commence your attack?" she adds, with a smile.

"I shall fire my first shot at this fancy ball; and that reminds me—I must think about a costume. All these things are so abominably expensive," he says, ruefully.

Sir Mortimer does not like parting with his money on any pretence whatever. You would be surprised if you only knew what strict economy is

practised in every detail of his gorgeous establishment. That simile of the Hidalgo's dinner, which I have applied to the entertainments given by the county families of Farnorth, is singularly applicable likewise to the Baronet's domestic arrangements. There is a great deal more table-cloth than meat at Plantagenet Park; table-cloth, so to speak, pervades the whole household. His majesty is fond of show and glitter; and it is very difficult to combine this taste with a naturally penurious disposition. He will not abate an inch of table-cloth, and so he curtails the meat. There is a stint of comfort at the palace. The intelligent reader may have observed I have glanced at this fact when I said the ladies of Becklands had shivered in my Lady Plantagenet's large morning-room when they returned her ladyship's condescending visits. There was a lack of fires at Foxcroft. I am pretty certain the tradespeople of Farnorth eat a better dinner every day off their willow-patterned plates than is daily set before his majesty of Foxcroft, though Monseigneur's may be served on silver.

My lady's jointure is a tolerably good one. Nelly Brown did not throw over her own and Edward Sparkles' happiness without securing to herself some collateral advantages. The ena-

moured old Baronet had to pay pretty well for his fancy. [The hatchment for her first ladyship had barely appeared on the walls of Foxcroft before the settlements for his second marriage were drawn up.] My lady expends nearly the whole of her income over her son's household. She does not reserve to herself much pin-money—and even out of that reservation she is liberal in gifts to her step-daughter. It is well for Miss Winifred that she is, for, as I mentioned before, her unprincipled old father dissipated her fortune during her minority, and, dying intestate, has left her dependent on her brother. I do not think his majesty would ever help her to purchase those fallals with which the poor lady loves to adorn herself.

"Fancy costumes are such abominably expensive things to buy," the Baronet repeats; "and there is no chance of hiring any in these benighted regions."

"It would scarcely suit the dignity of the master of Foxcroft to appear in second-hand clothes," says my lady. "I dare say I can find money enough to provide a dress to set off my son's good looks; where nature has been so bountiful very little art is needed."

The Baronet throws his eyes for a moment on the mirror opposite.

"I think I shall not have much difficulty in running down the soldier. Faugh! I have no fancy for losing my liberty though. I never had any taste for that ceremony which, as Walter Scott says, begins with 'Dearly beloved,' and ends with 'amazement.'"

"I think the little Peruvian very charming," says her ladyship.

The Baronet makes a wry face.

"It requires the whole of the sugar, lying to her father's account at his bankers, to reconcile me to the dose; however, if I am to take the *grand sérieux* air with one cousin, I shall most assuredly amuse myself with the other; and now I must attend to these dispatches," And the graceful Baronet lazily leaves the room.

How wonderful is the power of maternal love! My Lady Plantagenet is a sensible woman. She has a very just idea of right and wrong. She is, to a certain extent, well disciplined—no one could lie, a helpless invalid, the many years that she has done, without learning to think seriously—and yet, this superior woman is blind and deaf to the contemptible nature of her handsome son. Those coxcomb speeches of his, which have nauseated me as I have written them, have not disgusted his mother. She has

sometimes met them with a mild remonstrance, and that is all. When my lady recommends Zoé Harding to her son, she thinks she is carving out a brilliant destiny for the iron man's daughter. Sir Mortimer is young, handsome, and most fascinating in his mother's partial eyes. He has rank and position. What could the most *exigeante* heiress require more? Her ladyship has been greatly charmed with the pretty child—the naïve winning manners of Zoé Harding have quite fascinated the woman of the world, and she is really anxious to secure her for her son—and so that splendid hawk, Sir Mortimer, prepares himself to swoop upon the tender little bird, and tear her gentle heart out with his cruel claws.

CHAPTER XV.

I HOPE the reader has not forgotten the Reverend Archibald Middleton, the clerical Adonis whose star shone so brightly before the planet Mars, in the shape of Horace Snowe, partially dimmed its lustre. I have never once alluded to his Reverence since that dinner at Mr. Harding's, when Sword threw Gown so sadly in the shade. I don't think the young ladies at Becklands treated the clergyman well that evening. They permitted the soldier to monopolise the whole of their attention, and left the man of peace to graze upon Books of Beauty and stereoscopic views, and find what pasturage he could. Poor Gown had glared savagely at Sword, and his thoughts had wandered wistfully to those pleasant tea parties in Farnorth, where he had reigned monarch of all he surveyed since he came to the neighbourhood. The young Curate is a good-looking man, in spite of the closely shaven lip and chin, which Protestantism enforces as rigidly on its clergy as Papistry does

the tonsure on its monkish priests; he is well connected, and has alluded more than once to the living of Slippersly, in the beautiful county of that name, which living is in the gift of his father, and will, of course, revert to the young man when time and gout have removed the present incumbent. Perhaps this last fact (I mean the reversion of the living) may have a little to do with the Reverend Archibald's excessive popularity amongst the matrons and their pretty young daughters of our district. Mrs. Bland is particularly fond of the curate—the relict really feels quite motherly towards him—she told Mrs. Silvester so, on the memorable day when Algy's wife paid that long visit. I have hinted that Sophy Bland has a great partiality for her young pastor, and I believe the partiality is mutual, and might have culminated before this in a satisfactory manner, if the clergyman had not been invited to that dinner at Becklands. He did not enjoy himself, as we have seen—he was made to play second fiddle, or, indeed, scarcely any fiddle at all—and when you have led the orchestra for some time, it is very painful to fill a subordinate position. Nevertheless, out of that mortifying evening ideas were begotten in the mind of Sophy Bland's idol which were very unfavourable to the innocent hopes of

his pretty worshipper. From the corner where he had sat neglected in the Becklands drawing-room, the good-looking curate had watched and admired his beautiful young hostess—magnificent Clara did not eclipse charming Zoé in the eyes of his Reverence. I am afraid he was dazzled with the golden shimmer which surrounded the young heiress; but he thought he was only smitten with her youth and beauty. When he took Zoé's little hand in his at parting, poor Sophy Bland was nowhere in the fickle thoughts of her clerical lover. "Faint heart never won fair lady," his Reverence murmurs, as he returns to his bachelor rooms at Farnorth, and he determines from that hour to drop the widow's daughter and try his chance with Mr. Harding's heiress. How beautifully she would grace the quaint rooms of the Rectory of Slippersly, its future rector thinks, and then he falls to calculating—as I fear he has often done before—the age of the present incumbent, and the probability of the next attack of gout carrying him off, &c. &c.; for bare feet *will* long to thrust themselves into comfortable shoes, even though the longing involve unchristianlike hopes. Cold looks and freezing words chill Sophy Bland's tender heart when next she meets her pastor at those pleasant tea parties. Tears dim her bright

eyes, and a wistful look shadows her pretty face as she wonders at the change. The Curate is vain, and somewhat worldly, but he is not heartless, and he has a conscience, and that conscience reproaches him at sight of Sophy's pale wan face; but it does not turn him from his course, and so the Reverend Archibald commences his wooing of the young heiress.

The Baronet, who, as we have seen, is meditating an attack in the same direction, will be aided and abetted by his lady mother. Clara has inculpated his maiden aunts in those invidious hints which she has breathed against the soldier. She has indirectly accused the poor ladies of assisting their nephew in his interested pursuit—for interested Algy's daughter constantly declares that pursuit to be. The Reverend Archibald Middleton has no kind feminine friend to help *him*, and so he goes in manfully to win his honours with his own right hand.

In the morning call that he made at Becklands after that unlucky dinner, the Curate strove very hard to be fascinating, and say clever things. "The desire of appearing clever often prevents our being so," says the French sage—and his pithy saying was applicable to the Reverend Archibald. The jewels he produced were mere

Brummagem ware—glass beads, fit only to dazzle the eyes of the ignorant little savages who formed the principal portion of the Farnorth tea parties. When the man of peace took his leave, Clara discussed him as unmercifully as she had done on the previous evening. His designs were quite transparent to this terrible young person, and she did not spare him.

"Another Jason in search of the golden fleece," she said to her cousin. "Beware little Creusa of avenging Medea. You will not rob the lambs of Farnorth of their shepherd, cruel Zoé? There will be a wail in all their dwellings if you do."

"The shepherd has already selected a lamb out of his own fold. The Curate is engaged to Sophy Bland. You are premature in your suspicions this time, Clara."

"*Nous verrons.* I have lived longer in the world than you, my little maiden. I tell you there was mischief lurking in the Curate's careful toilette. Cupid's arrows were hidden in his neat tie and hermetically sealed vest. I will bet you a dozen pairs of Jouvin's gloves he will propose within the month. Will you take the wager, Zoé?"

And now when Zoé and Madame made their round of charitable visits they always found the

Curate stationed at the bedside of his sick parishioners. The invalids were loud in praise of "t' parson" during this period. When his ministry was over he joined the little heiress and her governess, and escorted them to Becklands. He was no favourite with the French lady, whom, by the way, he did not take pains to conciliate. She would not accept those gaudy glass beads of his. "La bêtise a deux manières d'être," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, "elle se tait, ou elle est parleuse. La bêtise qui est muette est supportable; mais la bêtise qui est parleuse! . . ." The Parisian could not find words strong enough to express her horror of "la bêtise parleuse." She was discussing his Reverence when she made this apparently irrelevant remark; and I am afraid she intended it to apply to some of those rubies and diamonds which had fallen from his lips. There was an air of studied gallantry in all he said and did, which forced the conviction on Zoé's mind, that her cousin was quite right when she had declared there were sinister designs lurking in the careful toilette and fine speeches of the Reverend Archibald Middleton.

Zoé had very little patience with her reverend admirer; I am sorry to say she was almost rude to him, and, had not his vanity been triple-

mailed, he must have seen the utter hopelessness of his pursuit. But the Curate was not remarkable for a low estimate of himself; and I believe he was tolerably certain in his own mind of receiving a favourable answer to that foolish letter he enclosed in one to the master of Becklands, about a month after he had murmured the proverb which conveys hope to timid lovers.

Mr. Harding could scarcely believe his eyes when he read this formal proposal for his daughter's hand from a man about whom he knew nothing, saving that he had seen and heard him in the pulpit every Sunday, and had on one occasion received him as a guest at his table. I do not fancy his Reverence would have been altogether flattered had he seen the expression of the master of Beckland's face as he rang the bell to summon his little heiress.

"What is the meaning of *this*, child?" he said, when Zoé appeared. "Have I been blind and deaf, or has this reverend gentleman lost his senses? What have you done, *ma mie*, to justify this?" And he handed the Curate's pompous letter to his daughter.

Zoé glanced her eyes over it, and her face flushed angrily.

"It is most provoking. I am utterly disgusted,"

she said passionately. "I could not help it, papa; I have done my best to avert it."

"Done your best to avert it, child?" said her father, who could not repress a smile at the little girl's excitement. "Why, when have you seen this man, Zoé? He has only been here once, as far as I can remember, and then I thought both you and Clara were wanting in courtesy to him. He must have the most extraordinary——"

"I have met him several times when Madame and I have visited the poor people. He always would insist on walking with us, and he has been so laboriously polite, I was afraid he meant something; and Clara——"

"Your cousin is very shrewd. I am glad she gives you the advantage of her worldly wisdom, *mignonne*. I am afraid I cannot persist in thinking you still a child, when I have reminders such as these to invest you with the glories of womanhood, Zoé. Here is an enclosure for you from the amorous curate. May I see its contents?"

It must have taken many hours of severe thought to concoct that wonderful epistle. Sophy Bland would have treasured it to the day of her death; but the little Peruvian was only moved to indignation by its eloquent pleading.

"You have no fancy for this future Rector of

Slippersly, Zoé?" said Mr. Harding, as he placed his arm around his daughter's waist. "The glory of presiding over the 'grand old rectory'—I quote from your admirer's MS.—has no charms for my little girl. We must answer these fine effusions civilly, in spite of those indignant eyes. I wish myself this man had never written; he has dispelled some pleasant dreams. I must take care of my nestling," he murmured, as he caressed Zoé's fair cheek; "there are hawks abroad."

"I hope you will believe in me for the future, sweet innocence," said Clara to her cousin. "I claim my gloves, mademoiselle—Jouvin's best, if you please—I told you he would propose within the week."

Civilly as the refusal of his hand and the prospective Rectory of Slippersly was conveyed by the master of Becklands and his daughter, the Curate greatly resented the affront to his vanity, and Zoé received the merest ghost of a bow from the offended man of peace whenever she encountered him. His attention to the heiress had been very openly prosecuted, and Farnorth was quite occupied with this gossip for some time. Good-natured young friends transmitted every report to Sophy Bland, and completely chased away her roses during the month her faithless Archibald

was behaving so very foolishly. The banished bloom returned to the cheeks of the relict's young daughter very shortly after the Curate had received that unsatisfactory reply to his wonderful love letter. It was presently whispered amongst his flock that their pastor was really engaged to Sophy Bland. The belles of Farnorth decided in secret council that "poor Sophy had no spirit—*they* would not have taken Zoé Harding's leavings"—and I dare say they would not; but the remarks of the high-minded beauties did not prevent the ordering of orange blossom, and silk, and tulle, and cake; nor indeed did they abate any other of those recognised preparations for making obeisance to the cap which Gessler has chosen to hoist upon a pole.

I suppose very few young ladies shed tears over their first offer, but I know that Zoé did. The Curate's proposal mortified her extremely. There was no need to put on Clara's worldly glasses to detect the interested motives which had actuated this reverend admirer. We are apt to generalise from individual instances, and there was a chill feeling at the poor girl's heart as she generalised from this individual instance; and the distrust and doubt which Clara had so carefully sown took still deeper root.

The beautiful woman's influence over her young cousin is daily increasing; Zoé dares not continue those visits to Rose Cottage, in which she at one time so much delighted. "You must pay your black mail, you little rebel," her cousin says. "You cannot go in the face of awful Mrs. Grundy. Beware of holy *Vehme* señorita. Do you know what that mighty tribunal would say if you persevered in your intimacy with the maiden ladies? Be patient, pretty Zoé; I tell you you have a talisman that must command success."

Such an assurance was very consolatory to the little heiress, you may easily imagine. Horace Snowe has good reason to wonder at the capricious conduct of his aunts' favourite. The childish grace, the frank confiding manner, which had charmed and made such inroad into the soldier's manly heart when first he made her acquaintance, are all gone now. Zoé is cold and courteous, and quietly repels the efforts Horace makes to melt the ice with which she surrounds herself as with a veil. The mortified soldier turns to Clara for consolation, and seems to lend himself with such pleasure to enjoy her brilliant conversation, and gaze upon her matchless beauty, that the poor little heiress turns sick and faint, and is glad enough to find some good excuse to leave the

room and hide her bitter tears, and moan her heavy sorrow to that only *confidante* of all her woes, her pillow.

We have heard Clara tell her father that she does not intend her cousin to marry Horace Snowe, and we have seen her self-control leave her for a moment when Algy jokingly accused his daughter of a wish to appropriate the soldier.

Envy of her young cousin's brilliant position, and a malign pleasure in inflicting pain, were at first the only motives which induced Clara to utter those bitter words impugning Horace Snowe's disinterestedness. A far stronger power impels her arrows now. The frank brave man has quite fascinated this false worldly woman. His strength of frame, his strength of intellect, his strength of will, have overcome her. She has struggled against the feeling—she has bitterly reproached herself for her weakness, but she is not the less made captive and enchained; and yet she was perfectly sincere when she ridiculed the idea of linking her destiny with a nameless hero. Were Horace a kneeling suppliant at her feet she would accept his worship, but she would not wed him—she would not sacrifice her ambitious projects for any such mad folly. But the soldier will never be a kneeling suppliant at her feet, and she knows

it. His heart is given to the rich man's daughter, and this conviction it is which has blackened into hatred Clara's envy of the poor motherless girl, whose evil genius she is—"She shall never know this soldier loves her," she says fiercely. "The little fool would part with her birthright for this mess of pottage. She shall *never* marry Horace Snowe."

And still the evening concerts go on, and the soldier's fine voice and Clara's rich contralto tones mingle harmoniously together, and little Zoé accompanies the singers with her harp, and Mr. Harding listens and enjoys the pleasant music, and never dreams of aching hearts or wounded feelings. He sees his little girl is graver than she was, but he sighs and thinks that Zoé is growing a woman now, and that the ringing laugh and merry smile of hers must fade with other childish things. Her brightest looks are given to her father, and there are still moments when, with him, the little heiress is the happy fairy she was three months ago.

Clara has bewitched the master of Becklands, as she bewitches nearly all who approach her. Those Machiavellian speeches which fall so freely from her lips amuse the man of the world, whose own experiences have not been calculated to raise his estimate of human nature. There is something

piquante too in hearing this beautiful young creature thus emphatically denounce her own species. Those candid speeches of hers have also their full weight with him. They appear the evidence of a noble mind, which, in its hatred of hypocrisy and false seeming, chooses rather to simulate vice than to assume virtue.

I cannot exactly define the soldier's feelings for this lovely syren—indeed, I do not know them. She is so brilliant, beautiful, and accomplished, it would be well nigh impossible for mortal man to resist her influence; and yet Horace is frequently *distrait* when Clara is most brilliant, and her efforts are powerless to recall his wandering attention. There is a glitter in her fine eyes at such moments that would strangely startle the abstracted man were he by chance to see it. Horace Snowe is, in character, as opposed to Clara as light is to darkness—he is true and good, she is false and cruel; but the greatest peculiarity of this extraordinary woman, and the one which is the most difficult to reconcile with the rest of her character, is her genuine appreciation of all that is noble, grand, and good. Clara—the bold, daring sceptic, who is at very little pains to conceal her contempt for her young cousin's simple faith—is often quite eloquent in praise of the beautiful

moral code which Christianity teaches; she admires the grand sonorous language of the Bible, and very frequently draws her illustrations from its chapters. This woman—whose life is one long lie—who holds the Jesuit creed, that the end justifies the means—is nevertheless, with a strange inconsistency, haughtily intolerant of falsehood in others. She is wonderful in detecting the hidden deformity which cunning covers with showy garments, and she strips them away with a merciless hand. Like the Athenians, Clara knows what is right, but she leaves it to the Lacedæmonians to practise.

The frank bearing, the brave manly sincerity of the soldier are his greatest charms in the eyes of Algy's daughter. There is no meanness, no littleness in this man's nature. Clara may chafe in her chains, but she cannot despise the captor—chafe in her chains, the beautiful captive does; and as day by day she is carried further into bondage, her self-reproach is very bitter. She is all unprepared for this obstacle in her ambitious way—all unused to this mastery over her strong will; but she will break her fetters, she will crush this unworthy feeling as she would a scorpion in her palm, and if the reptile sting her no one shall see the swollen and discoloured limb.

CHAPTER XVI.

No sooner was the Fancy Ball, under the distinguished patronage of my Lady Plantagenet, officially announced, than every establishment, for thirty miles round, was thrown into a fever of excitement. Poor Paterfamilias was besieged and cruelly fleeced. Miss Benton was made a fit candidate for Bedlam by the many orders which she had to remember and execute. The public library was crowded daily with pretty Farnorthites and its dusty shelves ransacked for books of costumes. Young ladies consulted their maids and their mirrors, and carefully studied the pages of Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron. Minnas and Brendas dreaded the possible apparition of other Minnas and Brendas. Amy Robsart was in an agony lest half a dozen Amys should dispute her claims to Elizabeth's favourite. Desolation and despair reigned for many days in those households where the stinginess of the head compelled its daughters to accept the commonplace *rôle* of flower-girls. "Book-muslin and ribbons, and a nasty little hat

on your head, dear, and that's all," the would-be Gulnares and Medoras angrily declare. Many tears were shed, and some envy, hatred, and malice engendered during this period. But the fame of the fancy ball spread far and wide, and rosy cheeks deepened and bright eyes grew brighter as rumours of a coming army of partners were everywhere circulated.

The ladies of Becklands are infected with the universal epidemic. Zoé is to make her first appearance as a come-out young lady, and we all know the delights of a first ball to the pretty *débutante.* Madame is very much excited, and suggests at least twenty different costumes for her pupil. These are, however, all negatived by Clara, who decides that the little heiress shall appear as the bride of Oberon. "You will make a charming Titania, *belle cousine,* but we must have no more fondling of the ass's ears, my queen of the fairies," she whispers, in tones that flutter her hearer's heart. For herself, Algy's daughter selects the dress of Undine.

The grave master of Becklands takes some interest in their arrangements, and gives his daughter *carte blanche* to provide whatever she desires for herself and cousin. Mrs. Silvester is very anxious to wear a fancy costume at this ball. It takes several days, and the present of a hand-

some green velvet dress from her brother, as also a liberal donation of oaths and fierce words from Mokanna, to reconcile the good lady to her ordinary matronly costume.

"When I was staying with my grandfather, Sir Theodore Baynes," she wails, "I went to a fancy ball given by the officers at Woolwich, and I wore such a pretty dress, all covered with spangles, and the petticoat quite short, and everybody said I was the belle, and——"

"'Gad, the rest of the women must have been a plain lot," suggested her amiable husband. "You were never a beauty, Maria, and now, by Jove! you must be fourteen stone weight if you are a pound!"

"I don't dye my whiskers and moustache, at any rate," says Madam, flaring up, and driven by her rage to reveal the secrets of the prison-house.

"You don't *die* at all, that's the worst of it. I wish you would," said Algy, grinning at his pun.

His wife burst into a flood of tears.

"I knew a shower would follow that clap of thunder," remarks the affectionate husband, as he quietly closes the door on his weeping helpmate.

Though Algy will not allow his wife to depart from the conventional dress of her century, he has no intention of limiting himself to plain broad-

cloth. Algy determines on wearing the turban and full trousers of the Mussulman. "It is not the first time you have turned Turk," says his wife, who is really growing quite witty.

"'Gad, I wish I were the Sultan in earnest, wouldn't I give my Sultana the sack!" replied her husband.

Clara wishes the master of Becklands to adopt the costume of Louis Quatorze. Zoé does not like this suggestion.

"Papa is a much better-looking man than that pockmarked, polished old hypocrite ever was," she cries indignantly. "Papa has the kindest heart in the world, and I think it would have puzzled an anatomist to have found the smallest portion of one beneath the velvet and jewels of Le Grand Monarque."

"Granted, my little tea cup in a storm," says Clara, smiling at her young cousin's excitement, "but this is not a question of hearts. My uncle has all the courtesy of manner possessed by the royal Louis, and he will look the part to perfection."

And so Zoé's objections were overruled, and the peruke and the velvet and jewels ordered.

The long looked-for twenty-fifth arrived at last. The King, the Sultan, the Queen of the Fairies,

and lovely Undine, admiringly survey each other in the large drawing-room at Becklands.

"I know who will be the belle of the ball," whispers the Sultan to his daughter. "I swear by the prophet you are more beautiful than any of his houries."

Mrs. Silvester presently joins the rest of the party. She wears the velvet dress her brother gave her, a cap of delicate Honiton rests upon her pale drab hair; a handsome diamond brooch, also the gift of her brother, confines the lace at her throat; but all this splendour has not smoothed the peevish lines out of the face of Algy's wife.

"This brooch is all very well," she said to the maid who had helped to adorn her charms, "it is all very well, but the diamonds are only small. When I went to the ball at Woolwich, grandpapa had the family diamonds reset for me. They were as large, as large; and I quite blazed with jewels; everybody said I was the belle," she repeated.

Mrs. Silvester has a habit of taking her maids into her confidence, and infuriates her husband and daughter by so doing.

Madame has no eyes for any one but her *petite reine*. She is blind to the beauty of Undine. She only just glances at Louis Quatorze, and the Sultan is beneath contempt. She has superintended the

arrangement of every detail of Titania's fairy costume, and has been prodigal of admiring interjections. When the bride of Oberon was pronounced to be completely attired, Madame very nearly destroyed her handiwork by the eagerness with which she embraced her pupil. "*N'est-ce pas qu'elle est charmante, charmante ; n'est-ce pas qu'elle est ravissante de beaute?*" she appeals unceasingly to every one.

Titania is certainly very pretty, but I am obliged to admit her beauty sinks into nothingness when compared with that of Undine. Algy's daughter is lovely as a painter's dream this evening. Her magnificent golden hair falls in rippling waves far below her waist; her violet eyes shine with almost more than earthly beauty. The Sultan was right when he said his daughter would be the belle of the ball; no one will be able to contest the palm with Clara Silvester.

* * * * *

Very great credit was due to the Committee of Management for the taste they had displayed in decorating the large Concert Hall of Farnorth. The hall is private property, and is not remarkable for elegance in general; it has been built more for use than ornament. County Courts, poultry shows, and flower shows are held in it.

The walls are simply plastered, and artificial light is conveyed through a very unsightly medium. The good taste of the Committee has hidden the primitive simplicity of the chandeliers with evergreens and flowers, and has gracefully draped the white walls with crimson cloth. Bright-coloured flags are placed above the orchestra, and the orchestra itself is ornamented with green wreaths, enclosing the gilded letters which form the motto of the Plantagenet family. The best band that Blankshire can produce has been engaged, and the conductor's *bâton* is waving amidst the forest of fiddles. A couch, covered with crimson velvet, is placed at the head of the room: it is the throne of state Farnorth has prepared for the Lady Patroness.

The dancing has not commenced when Le Grand Monarque enters the ball-room with his party. Giles Houndly, Esq., who wears his ordinary dress, and is one of the stewards, is in a great state of flurry and excitement. "Of course we cannot begin dancing before her ladyship arrives," he says to the master of Becklands. "It is already past ten; I expected she would give herself some confounded airs. It is a pity she has not inherited her father's good sense. Old Caleb never kept his customers waiting," Giles adds with a malicious grin.

Titania gazes with delight on the motley scene; there must be nearly two hundred people present; there are a great number of strange faces in the room, indeed, nearly all the Romeos, Hamlets, Fausts, Sultans, Pachas, Greeks, Cardinals, and Brigands, are unknown to Farnorth. The local belles have exerted themselves to the utmost, and their efforts have been crowned with success. There are some lovely Desdemonas, Rowenas, Rebeccas, Fenellas, and Dic Vernons, in the large Concert Hall. The flower-girls, who wept at their enforced *rôle*, are now bright and blooming. They have forgotten their disappointment as their mirrors have reflected their pretty faces, and the "nasty little hat" is found to be really rather becoming. Lucy Bland wears the dress of Medora. The bride elect, who has of course renounced all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, has assisted at her sister's toilette, and being sustained by the glories of her position, has remained a cheerful Cinderella at home. Horace Snowe very soon finds his way to that corner of the room where glorious Undine and pretty Titania are commanding universal admiration. The tall soldier has adopted the Highland dress of Rob Roy, but he looks infinitely handsomer than the Scottish reiver ever could have done.

Horace had scarcely paid his compliments when a buzz and a general excitement in the room proclaimed the approach of the king of Farnorth and his train. His majesty enters the Concert Hall supporting his mother, who walks, poor lady, with great difficulty. Lady Plantagenet has selected the dress of Conrad for her handsome son, and the costume is very becoming to his dark Italian beauty. Miss Winifred wears patches and powder, and is attired in a magnificent dress of brocade which was once worn by a Plantagenet at the Court of the second George. Miss Winifred, who is slightly flushed, looks remarkably well. I am sorry the Dean of Northminster cannot see her.

My Lady Plantagenet arrests the steps of her son as they near that group which Horace Snowe has just joined. Her ladyship says a few graceful words to the beautiful girls, and introduces her handsome son to Undine and Titania. The Corsair bows admiringly, and secures the hand of the Queen of the Fairies for the first dance. Giles Houndly, Esq., rushes forward and hurries her ladyship to the crimson throne of state.

The conductor's *bâton* waves wildly, the best band in Blankshire unite in harmony, and a quadrille is formed. The Corsair leads Titania to the post of honour, and the ball commences.

Conrad pays great attention to his pretty partner: he inwardly endorses the opinion expressed by his mother. The heiress of Becklands is much prettier than he fancied she was; but his fine eyes wander very frequently to that part of the room where beautiful Undine is gracefully gliding through the mazes of the dance.

Algy's daughter is universally proclaimed the belle of the ball, but the rush of partners is not nearly so great to her as it is to her cousin. Titania's card is filled up in no time. When Horace Snowe comes forward to engage her for a dance, there is no vacancy for the disappointed Macgregor. A rumour has quickly circulated amongst the Hamlets, Romeos, Fausts, Greeks, Cardinals, and Brigands, that the pretty little girl dressed as Oberon's bride is "Harding's only child, the fellow you know who has made such a pot of money out of Sam Gravell's old mine." And so you may easily imagine the interest she excites.

Horace Snowe dances more than once with lovely Undine. "The child's head will be quite turned," she says, as she directs his attention to Titania's crowd of worshippers. "See how the little lady dispenses her favours. I always knew there were the seeds of a flirt of the first water in my young cousin. The Baronet is the fortunate

man who secures her sweetest smiles. Little Zoé intends to be mistress of Plantagenet Park."

"Sir Mortimer is a very handsome man," says the soldier with a smothered sigh.

"Yes, but that is not his great attraction in the eyes of pretty Titania. Zoé is an aristocrat. She would have perished *à la lanterne* in the time of the first revolution. I suppose it must be owing to her descent from some of the Spanish grandees, for my uncle is a democrat, a regular red republican as I am. Zoé is a devout believer in the mumbo-jumbo of ancestors, and of what she calls pure blood, and a name without a stain. I assure you the genealogical tree of the Plantagenets produces all the bright looks which the Queen of the Fairies lavishes on the fortunate Conrad."

"I fancied from what I have heard about Miss Harding, indeed from what she has herself said, that—. May I take you down to supper," says poor Horace, suddenly, as the haughty Corsair passes him with Titania on his arm.

"I hope you will admit I have done my duty," whispers Sir Mortimer to his mother, as he leads her to the ball-room again, after supper; "I am going to amuse myself now. I mean to have a regular *battue* this evening. I shall bring the heiress to you; her herd of worshippers are feed-

ing down below. I expect you will improve the occasion, my lady." And Conrad, after gracefully conducting Titania to a seat near the crimson velvet throne, glides away to scatter desolation in the breasts of the belles of Farnorth.

Lady Plantagenet exerts herself to talk to her pretty companion. There is a charm in her ladyship's manner which captivates Zoé infinitely more than the somewhat *fâde* compliments of the fascinating Conrad have done. The heiress will not drop down at my lord's feet like the rest of his sulphured pheasants, but his mother is the best ally he could possibly have secured. Lady Plantagenet is irresistibly pleasing when she chooses so to be. When Giles Houndly told Algernon Silvester that my Lady Plantagenet's father had waited on him hat in hand, he simply asserted a deliberate falsehood: the J. P. for the county was in the habit of freely indulging in such fabrications. "T' äde Lä-yer will lee," the Farnorth rustics declare. Caleb Brown was an army clothier; he never measured Giles for a coat in his life. Honest Caleb realised a very handsome fortune in his calling; he had retired into private life before his only child was born. Nelly Brown was brought up almost as luxuriously as the Duke of Overall's daughter. She was much better educated than that

noble lady. But a dark day came to the clothier's heiress. Her father was induced to invest all his savings in some bubble company; and when he died a broken-hearted bankrupt, his pretty daughter was thrown upon the world with nothing but her learning and accomplishments to keep her from starving. She had been governess in one or two families before she filled that place in the Baronet's household. No one took any trouble to dig up her ancestors till she became Lady Plantagenet number two, and then Farnorth greedily circulated the fact about her tailor father. Giles Houndly keeps the gossip alive. If the young Baronet knew how pertinaciously the master of Gothic Hall points to this blot on his escutcheon, the doors of Foxcroft would be closed against the ambitious ex-lawyer. Nelly Brown's son is very sensitive on this subject; the shears inflict as deadly a wound on his pride as the White Lady of Avenel's bodkin did on that of Sir Percie Shafton.

The Hamlets, Romeos, Fausts, Sultans, Pachas, Greeks, Cardinals, and Brigands, have finished their supper, and one of their number rushes forward to claim the Queen of the Fairies for the next waltz. Titania is whisked away from the crimson velvet throne of the Lady Patroness. Conrad is busily piercing the hearts of every

beauty in the room. The Corsair will have reason to be satisfied with his *battue* this evening. Electro-plate shines quite as brightly as silver, we know, and to those foolish maidens who do not care to look for the mark of the true British Lion, the false metal, until all its fine glitter rubs off, is just as good as the genuine. Rowenas, Rebeccas, Amy Robsarts, Medoras, and pretty flower-girls will each carry away with her the pleasant conviction that she, and she alone, has captivated the charming Conrad. I have said that his majesty of Foxcroft has attained marvellous skill in the prosecution of his favourite amusement, and his whispered lies are greedily swallowed by the poor silly rustic belles. Beautiful Undine does not pay much attention to Conrad's fine speeches. The Corsair brings the whole artillery of his charms to bear when he dances with the belle of the room. Languishing looks from his dark eyes, tender smiles, smothered sighs, and flattering words are aimed at Algy's daughter. "The Baronet is far more smitten with you than he is with Harding's little filly," Algy says to Clara in the course of the evening. "Bah!" she replies, "he means to marry Mademoiselle Tartine. His estate is heavily mortgaged, and the daughter of Dives is to free his fettered acres. He is only a poor creature,

this Baronet; do you think I care for his fine-turned speeches? I know the value of such false coin."

"There is never any ring after it, eh, Clarry?" says the Sultan, who is very fond of indulging in his small jokes; "but whatever you say, I tell you the Baronet is far more smitten with you than he is with your cousin; and 'gad, I'm not surprised."

And the Sultan was right. Sir Mortimer is more smitten with Clara Silvester than he has ever been with any one before. "If it were the niece instead of the daughter I had to marry," he says to his mother, "I would go to the altar a willing victim."

Undine has conversed very frequently with the Macgregor during the evening. Titania has watched the couple more than once, and the gallant Hamlets and Romeos have been surprised at the sudden abstraction of their pretty partner. "Do you envy me the shadow, *petite reine*, when you can at any time purchase the substance?" Clara whispers to her cousin, as she prepares to join a waltz with Horace Snowe, but the comfort conveyed by her words does not bring back the light to Zoé's eyes.

And the famous fancy ball at length comes to an end. Carriages are ordered, and the Corsair

envelopes the Fairy Queen in her mantle, and craves permission to call at Becklands, and, in short, has commenced the siege in earnest.

There has not been unmixed enjoyment at this ball. The upper stratum of Farnorth society has adhered pertinaciously to the throne. It has been so terribly afraid of losing caste by coming in contact with the second formation, that it has passed a stupid evening, and seen little or nothing of the different costumes; it has indeed seen or spoken to no one but the Plantagenet family. It has scarcely eaten any supper by reason of its excessive exclusiveness; in short, it has paid the penalty of greatness.

Clara insists on dismissing Zoé's maid. "I will remove the fairy robes," Undine says. She passes quite an hour in discussing the events of the evening with her cousin. "I hope you are satisfied with your triumphs," she says; "you might have had three partners for every dance if you had so desired. Did I not prophesy the coming of these wolves, my little lambkin? I heard some of your partners talking about your father's mine. If you could have heard how rapturously they spoke of you when they had made some really clever calculations! Poor Corydon had no chance this evening." And so she rattled

on, and after she had bade Zoé an affectionate good-night, some of the wall-flowers who had envied Titania that evening would have been at a loss to account for the bitter tears which bedewed the pillow of the little Queen of the Fairies.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE maiden ladies of Rose Cottage were very anxious to be informed of all particulars connected with the fancy ball, and they beset Horace with innumerable questions when that gentleman appeared at a very late hour to partake of his morning meal.

"Was the dress of Titania becoming to our dear Zoé?" enquired gentle Mary.

"It was generally considered to be so I believe," answered her nephew. "Miss Silvester," he continued with enthusiasm, "was a most lovely Undine. Beautiful as I have always thought——"

"Do you think our dear young friend enjoyed her first ball?" interrupted Miss Alathea, rather rudely as I think.

"She appeared to do so. There was a perfect stampedo of partners for her. Miss Harding's card was filled up in no time. Miss Silvester was the acknowledged belle. I wish you could have seen her."

"I do hope Zoé will come herself and detail all the incidents of her first ball. The dear child has such a strong sense of humour," said Alathea; "there is never a spark of ill nature in anything she says. Indeed, from her earliest youth, I have impressed upon her the——"

"Zoé does not come here half so frequently as she did," said Mary sadly. "I cannot understand the reason."

"Her cousin monopolises her so much more than is necessary I think," fumed her sister. "We are very old friends of Zoé's, and I really think——"

"It is very natural the child should prefer companionship with one nearly her own age," interposed La Bonté, "and her cousin is so very clever and accomplished."

"Miss Silvester is certainly clever," admitted Alathea. "She gave me some valuable information on the subject of extraneous fossils, but," continued the *bas bleu*, who was fast wandering from the ball and preparing for a gallop on her old steed, "I do not agree with her in the theory she supports, that such strata for instance as that of mica-slate and some others have resulted from chemical precipitation. I am inclined rather to think that like the strata of sandstone and clay,

they have been deposited from the turbid waters of——"

"Will you be kind enough to deposit some of the turbid waters of your teapot into my cup, my dear La Sagesse?" broke in her nephew.

The learned lady complied with his reques rather sulkily.

"Have you seen any of the Plantagenet family lately, La Bonté?" enquired the soldier.

"I met Lady Plantagenet and her step-daughter the other day at Becklands. I have not yet seen her son; is he handsome?"

"All the ladies appear to think so, and of course they are the best judges in such matters. *I* think he is an insufferable puppy," said Horace savagely. "He is like his mother in appearance. He was quite devoted in his attentions to Miss Harding last evening. Your little favourite has every prospect of becoming the mistress of Plantagenet Park.

"From what I have heard about Sir Mortimer, I don't think he will prove acceptable to Zoé," said Mary, with some energy. "He has the reputation of being——"

"My dear La Bonté! he is handsome, fascinating, and well born. It appears the Peruvian holds very strong opinions with regard to that

latter attribute. Is it within the limits of possibility that his majesty of Farnorth can plead in vain?"

"I do not think Zoé will consent to share his throne. Zoé is the last in the world to be dazzled by show and glitter. I never met——"

"I beg your pardon, my dear Mary," put in Miss Alathea; "the child has a tendency to accept the surface. I have always observed this peculiarity, and my impression was confirmed," continued the phrenologist, "when I manipulated her head. The organs of causality and comparison are very imperfect. Now her cousin is exactly the reverse; if you notice her forehead——"

"It is as white as snow," said Horace. "Does that indicate a cool, calculating brain, La Sagesse? *A propos* of white foreheads—I never saw anything to equal the deadly pallor of Lady Plantagenet's face. The excitement of the evening did not colour it with the faintest flush. She was quite as attentive to Miss Harding as Sir Mortimer was. You will see I shall prove a true prophet. You will have a queen consort at the palace shortly."

"I do not think so," said Mary.

"I tell you the queen dowager is quite willing to abdicate in her favour. Farnorth shone forth

in exclusiveness last evening: the upper stratum of our society asserted its rights. I can assure you it would have nothing whatever to do with the strata of the transition series. I did not venture to approach ever so remotely the grand tertiary formation. I am making progress in your science, La Sagesse; I hope you will admit that."

"You are talking a vast amount of nonsense, my dear boy; but I really do wish you would apply yourself to the study of geology; you would find it most interesting. The tertiary formation," continued the enthusiastic lady, "comprehends both the alluvial and diluvial. You have plenty of time—"

"My days of idleness are numbered: my leave of absence expires in another fortnight."

"In another fortnight!" exclaimed both the ladies. "Impossible, my dear Horace. You have only been at home——"

"Nearly four months. I shall grow fat and lazy if my holiday lasts much longer. I want some active service. I wish there was a chance of a war with civilized white men."

"My dear Horace!" said Mary reproachfully.

"My *métier* is to kill and slay, La Bonté. You must let bears and lions growl and fight, it is their nature to. You cannot dispute the sentiment of

the authority I quote; although La Sagesse, as a purist, may object to the English. I long for the roar of the cannon; I am pining for the smell of powder. An empty sleeve, or a deep gash on one's face, would be very telling. I want a martial prefix to my name. I want to lose a dozen drops of blood and straight rise up a captain; but," he added, as he saw the tears were gathering in the eyes of the tender-hearted ladies, "there is very little chance of my laudable ambition being gratified. Peace has slept soundly since Waterloo, and is likely to enjoy her nap for some time longer."

"I do hope so," said Miss Alathea, fervently. "I was always averse to your adopting the profession of arms. But when you were five years old you declared you would be a soldier."

"The organ of combativeness is very large, as you will find when you examine my head, La Sagesse. Nature intended me to wear the red coat; I am fit for nothing else."

"Are you really obliged to join your regiment so very soon?" said Mary with a sigh.

"I must be in Dublin in a fortnight from this. I received my orders this morning. And now I will endeavour to dispel the effects of last night's dissipation by taking in as much fresh air

as I can." And so speaking, Horace left the room.

I think it was something more than last night's dissipation the soldier wished to dispel, as he sought the shady walk in the pleasant garden of Rose Cottage. He had worn his motley remarkably well. He had mouthed, and grinned, and acted his part to perfection; but though pride compels us to ignore the fox's teeth in public, nature levies her sighs and groans in private. [If our pillows could speak, what dismal records would the goose-feathers render!] Horace had a heavy heart under that fine Highland dress of his at last night's fancy ball. It is not one whit lighter this morning. Withered hopes do not look any better in the bright sunshine. We cannot always cover our dead with flowers, and the plague-stricken corpses were ghastly enough in the eyes of the soldier as he paced backwards and forwards on the narrow gravelled walks.

It was all over. He had slept in his Fools' Paradise, and common sense had awoke him with a rough shake at last. He had leant heavily on the lover's staff, and it had suddenly snapped in his hand and thrown him on the ground. What a contemptible fool he had been, he thought bitterly. What was *he* that he should dare to dream

dreams? a nameless man, beholden even for his very profession to the charity of two unselfish women upon whom he had no legal claim. The skeleton which has haunted him for a good many years now keeps closely by his side as he strides impatiently along. Hard thoughts against his dead parents eat into the soldier's heart. There was more of earnest than jest in those words of his when he had said he longed for war. He was in a state of mind to lead forlorn hopes, or rush into any mad kind of danger. Glory might give him a name, if the law of the land denied him one. Yes, he was glad he had received orders to join his regiment; he was glad he was going to leave Farnorth. The Baronet—and I am afraid Horace swore savagely as he thought of him—the Baronet would lose no time in his wooing. Zoé would of course accept the empty-headed coxcomb. Was he not rich, handsome, and well born? and as the soldier murmured the last two words his skeleton companion hugged him closely. Clara's well-aimed shaft had reached its mark. She had told him her cousin was ambitious; an aristocrat, worshipping a mumbo-jumbo of ancestors. Well, if he be indeed unworthy to approach so fine a lady, he will not again offend her with his presence; and then, when he has arrived at

this grand, spirited decision, a vision of the pretty little girl he had first seen at Rose Cottage rises before him. How naïve and winning she was—how attractive her *mignonne* beauty in the eyes of this great, strong man! Pride, jealousy, and common sense may do their best, but I do not think they will succeed in chasing away the tiny inmate who now occupies the whole of Horace Snowe's heart.

And the maiden ladies who sit together in their sunny drawing-room and mourn the arbitrary order which will take their boy so soon away from Farnorth, have yet not the faintest suspicion of any of the gloomy thoughts which are paling the face of the soldier as he passes to and fro before them. It is strange how we can live daily in the presence of the great human machine and yet know so little of its inner mechanism. So long as the monotonous beat goes on, we do not dream of broken chains and lagging wheels, and so the sympathy which might have bound together the one, and lubricated as with oil the other, is withheld from sheer ignorance of its necessity.

"I think I shall call at Becklands this morning," said Mary, when she had exhausted her lamentations on the subject of her nephew's approaching departure. "I wonder whether Horace will go with me?"

"I have not the least doubt that he will," answered her sister, with rather a mysterious air. "Between you and me, Mary, I believe he admires Miss Silvester. He is always——"

"She is very beautiful," said Mary.

"Very much so indeed. And Horace has such a keen appreciation of beauty. He has quite an artist's eye for—but that is not to be wondered at," said Alathea with a sigh.

"Zoé appears to be very fond of her cousin," said Mary.

"If they agree well together, it is on the principle that discords produce harmony," said Alathea with some energy. "Zoé is in every respect different to her cousin—if you observe the formation of their heads——"

"I should not be able to arrive at any definite conclusion, as I do not possess your knowledge, my dear Alathea."

"Most people consider the study of phrenology beneath their notice I know," said Alathea rather indignantly; "but in my opinion it has a firm basis. For granting that we can localise the seat of mind——"

"Is the shape of Miss Silvester's head so very different from Zoé's?" interrupted Mary, who stood in awe of her sister's last hobby. "You

must have some ingenuity if you have been able to trace the distinction through all that surrounding of magnificent golden hair which Miss Silvester arranges so gracefully."

"I have traced the distinction nevertheless," said Alathea. "Zoé's head is remarkable for the organs of benevolence and veneration; there is scarcely any development of either the one or the other in that of Miss Silvester. Again: secretiveness, cautiousness, and acquisitiveness are totally lacking in Zoé, and almost unnaturally developed in her cousin. You may rest assured, my dear Mary, I am perfectly correct in my conclusion that there is no resemblance between the characters of the two cousins."

"This difference in character evidently does not interfere with their friendship."

"I must again repeat, and I believe I am quoting from Miss Edgworth, that discords well managed produce the finest harmony. And now, my dear, I must leave you. I have by no means perfected myself in the four groups which subdivide the tertiary strata. The older pliocene does not, unfortunately, occur in this district, and the miocene——" The rest of the geologist's learned discourse was lost in the passage which led to her favourite study.

In spite of those fine-spirited words which Horace had murmured, he was willing enough to accede to Mary Snowe's request when she asked him to accompany her in a morning visit to Becklands. I have no doubt he proposed to himself a grand melo-dramatic *rôle;* but you see he had not the strength of mind which shuns temptation. The moth and candle peculiarity is very strongly developed in us. It is wonderful how stoically we persevere in that singeing and frizzling process. The soldier's wings have been fiercely burnt, but the smart and pain do not prevent his eager longing to flutter again in the neighbourhood of his bright tormentor. The Plantagenet carriage, with its gorgeous crimson liveries, was returning from Becklands as Mary and Horace Snowe walked up the long avenue. My Lady Plantagenet, her face looking still paler and more worn in the bright sunshine, leant back amongst the cushions. Monseigneur was seated near his mother, and his majesty honoured the two pedestrians with a haughty, supercilious stare as his grand carriage swept by them.

"Did you observe that tall, red-whiskered man?" he said to my lady; "that is my rival, the Bayard of Farnorth; the paladin of old women; the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche.*"

"I did not see him," said his mother. "Was he at the ball?"

"Yes; he wore the dress of Rob Roy."

"I did observe him then, and I thought he was very handsome."

"I fancied you had better taste than to admire such a great, hulking Rufus. He danced very frequently with that magnificent Clara Silvester; perhaps he prefers her to the little heiress, and no wonder if he does. How gloriously beautiful she is!" he added with enthusiasm.

"I am not a very great admirer of blondes," said her ladyship rather coldly. "How very charming the Queen of the Fairies looked this morning; so fresh, and dressed with such exquisite taste."

"I declare she has thrown quite a glamour over you, mother. I do not see anything in her to rave about, I must confess. She is pretty, certainly, but so small and insignificant looking when compared to her cousin."

"I think I have told you that Miss Silvester is perfectly portionless," remarked his mother. "You cannot afford to——"

"I know all about that, and your ladyship need not be alarmed. I have made up my mind to swallow the dose of physic you offer in a golden

bowl; but if you expect me not to make a wry face over it, you are mistaken."

"I think you will find the medicine has a pleasant flavour after all," said her ladyship with a smile, as her son assisted her from the carriage when they had reached Foxcroft. "Have you heard again from Sir Thomas?" she added, as they entered the house.

"Yes; and I shall have to go to London shortly to see if I can raise the money, at a ruinous percentage, amongst the descendants of Abraham. It won't do to part with that portion of the estate."

The Plantagenet family have been in the habit of consulting the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, very freely for more than half a century now. His present majesty of Foxcroft, in spite of his penurious habits, is on intimate terms with most of the tribes. His estate was very well nursed during his minority, but that selfish old profligate, his father, had so crippled it, that all the careful tending has been powerless to restore it to robust health.

Last night's dissipation had left none of its traces on the lovely face of Clara Silvester. She was filling the large drawing-room at Becklands with the rich tones of her voice when Plush and Powder

announced Horace and Mary Snowe. Zoé's pretty fingers swept the strings of the harp in accompaniment to her cousin. The little heiress does not evidently bear late hours so well as Algy's daughter: the child's face is pale, and there is not much brightness in her large dark eyes this morning. Poor Madame is yawning under the infliction of "*la bêtise parleuse*," for Mrs. Silvester is serving up a *réchauffé* of her Woolwich triumphs.

Zoé came eagerly forward to greet her dear La Bonté, but she did not extend the warmth of her greeting to Horace, and the soldier was thus better enabled to support his melo-dramatic *rôle*.

If Miss Alathea could have seen her nephew, as he approached Clara, she would have been confirmed in her impression that Horace greatly admired the beautiful girl. Undine did not receive the Macgregor as Titania had done, and the pair were soon engaged in a lively conversation. Clara was brilliantly sarcastic in her remarks on the motley assemblage in the Concert Hall, and, with a ready tact, she directed her sharpest arrows in the direction of that target which the soldier would have punctured all over with wounds if he could. She did not spare Sir Mortimer. Zoé would have been surprised if she had heard her cousin, for Algy's daughter had

spoken favourably of the Baronet when she had discussed the Plantagenet family with the little heiress.

"His majesty," she said, "is at this moment repeating the words of Cæsar, of that I am firmly convinced. There was the air of a conqueror in his manner this morning, and do you know I think it is not without reason. My little cousin is very young; she is attracted by all this tinsel and frippery. And then Sir Mortimer is the king of Farnorth, and that is everything in the eyes of Zoé."

"So I suppose," assented the poor soldier, "and everything in the eyes of most young ladies I imagine."

"You think so?" said Clara, slightly raising her handsome shoulders, as though deprecating the accusation on her own account. "I see the looming orange-blossom in my Lady Plantagenet's manner," she continued; "she is quite affectionate, almost maternal, to the little heiress."

"She is a very unhappy woman I should say—I mean Lady Plantagenet. I cannot think physical pain alone could have stamped that sad careworn look on her face."

"She jilted her lover and made a *mariage de convenance.* She is now paying the penalty of her

treachery. We are going to have quite a *levée* this morning; Jeeames is announcing Mrs. Bland and her daughters. I fancy the relict has some latent intention of paying homage to the future queen of Farnorth." And Clara left the soldier to digest this morsel as he best could.

Mrs. Bland is, as I have before observed, one of the most untiring talkers in the whole of the town or neighbourhood. She exercises her tongue very freely on all occasions. I think her pretty daughters would be very thankful if their mamma were a little more taciturn. She makes the poor girls uncomfortable very frequently by her cackling propensities; not that the widow is an ill-natured gossip, but really quite as much mischief is generated by her twaddling as even those venomous shafts of Giles Houndly produce. She does not spare herself, this garrulous lady. Everybody in Farnorth knows the exact extent of her income. We have most of us a wooden leg which we take some pains to conceal from the eyes of a discerning public. The widow makes no effort to hide hers; indeed she will lift her dress to show it. Her daughters often blush painfully as their genteel trappings are torn from their shoulders by their mother, and all the time the good lady is in happy ignorance of the pain she is inflicting. The

little bride elect had been rather anxious to keep the knowledge of one family skeleton from her somewhat aristocratic intended. The skeleton was only a *mésalliance* which had been made by a great uncle of hers, but still it was a skeleton, and Sophy did not wish its bones to rattle in the presence of the Reverend Archibald Middleton. Mrs. Bland had herself opened the door of the blue chamber and pointed out its inmate to the future Rector of Slippersly. I believe Sophy shed tears in secret when she heard of her mother's indiscretion. It was very foolish of the little girl no doubt, but I think it was rather natural.

"I must really congratulate both you young ladies on the charming toilettes you wore last evening," said the relict when she had seated herself comfortably. "I really did not know which dress to admire the most."

"The costume your daughter wore was very becoming to her," said little Zoé good naturedly.

"I am so glad to hear you say so; but if you only knew the contrivances we had before we could produce it!" said the widow, whilst poor Lucy moved about uneasily in her chair; "the skirt was made out of an old white satin dress of mine, and indeed I don't think there was a single new thing about the whole costume. Mary Dalton

was a whole week about it, and if the girls had not assisted her—and they are both very expert with their needles—it would have been just as expensive as if I had employed Miss Benton; for you know Mary Dalton has a shilling a day and her meat——"

"I don't think anybody will be interested in all these details," interposed Sophy in despair. "Did you enjoy the ball, Miss Harding? I don't think Lucy will be able to reconcile herself to every-day life, she was so delighted with everything."

"I tell Medora she has lost her heart to the handsome Corsair," said *la mère terrible;* "but it will not do for *her* to raise her eyes so high as *that.* My poor girls, Miss Harding, are tocherless lasses, with not too long a pedigree; for my great grandfather——"

"I thought Miss Winifred looked remarkably well," said Lucy, making another effort to stop the stumping of the wooden leg. "The powder and plumes were very becoming to her."

"Miss Winifred is a genteel-looking woman, and she has the high Overall nose," said Mrs. Bland. "Sir Mortimer is not a Plantagenet in appearance. Poor Mr. Frederick was more like his sister, only better looking. You remember

that sad story I told you, Miss Harding—most melancholy indeed—and engaged to be married too at the time!"

"Was he indeed?" said Zoé.

"Didn't I tell you that?" said the relict, whose tongue was in excellent order this morning. "Oh dear me, yes; he had been engaged, poor young man, for two years before he perished in that unfortunate manner. His *fiancée* was a Miss Marsden, daughter of Sir Thomas Marsden. She was a great friend of Miss Winifred's. The people of Farnorth have already decided who is to be the future mistress of Plantagenet Park, Miss Harding," continued the widow slily. "That blush is very becoming to you, my dear. I was afraid you were not well, but you look the picture of health at this moment. Are you going, Mr. Horace? and you, too, Miss Mary? *Good* morning. Remember me very kindly to your clever sister. How very attentive the soldier is to his maiden aunts," continued the garrulous lady when the door had closed on Mary and Horace Snowe; "but no wonder. I have learnt some particulars connected with their antecedents, and——"

"My dear mamma," said the bride elect, "I don't think you ought to——"

"Nonsense, child, we are all friends here. I

should be very sorry to make any mischief, but I am sure Mrs. Silvester would like to hear the story, it is so *very* romantic. You must know I have an old schoolfellow just settled in Grand Crag, North Devon; and when I heard Miss Alathea mention the other day that she had lived there some years, I was determined, as I am a true descendant of Eve, Miss Harding, to make an effort to pierce the mystery which has surrounded them so long, and so I wrote to my friend to make some enquiries, and she has developed *such* a romantic history. I have not time to tell you all the details, for I have to send off a silk dress to be dyed for one of the girls. You will scarcely know it from new, Miss Silvester, when it comes home. You know I have only a small income, and we are obliged to contrive—but as I was saying about the dear good ladies of Rose Cottage. It appears they had a younger sister who eloped with an artist, and broke the heart of her father, the old admiral. It turned out that the artist was a married man, and he of course deserted the poor young thing, and she died in giving birth to this very Horace Snowe, and——"

"Do you mean to say his father was never married to his mother," enquired Mrs. Silvester with a

horrified air. "Why he is only a——. I am surprised my brother should have permitted him to come here so much. I'm sure my poor papa would never——"

"Mr. Horace Snowe is a gentleman in every sense of the word," said Zoé, her eyes flashing and her cheeks flushing; "and if his dear aunts were so anxious to preserve this secret, I much question the good taste that——"

"We are not likely to repeat anything we have been told," interposed Clara; "and I am sure Mrs. Bland is too good natured to circulate this gossip any further. It might be the means of driving the Miss Snowes away from this neighbourhood, and——"

"I am sure I would rather any one left Farnorth than these dear ladies," said the poor relict, who was quite unprepared for this unfavourable reception of her twaddle; "and Mr. Horace is a great favourite of mine, and you know it is no fault of his if his father was so wicked. Every family has its troubles. My own uncle married his cook, and——"

"There will be a shower directly, mamma," interrupted Lucy Bland. "We must make haste home if you wish to escape a wetting."

"I certainly cannot afford to spoil my clothes,"

said *la mère terrible.* "I can only allow my girls,"—but the widow was hurried off by her daughters before she had stated the exact amount of their limited pin money.

"You must not let that tender heart of yours govern your head, *petite ingénue*," whispered Clara to her cousin, as she wound her arms affectionately about her, "or we shall have Mrs. Bland circulating twaddle amongst the Farnorthites to the effect that the heiress is in—, but I will not call up your roses, *petite.* Do you know I am very sorry for Corydon. His blue chamber has a very ugly tenant. It is no wonder he casts a longing look on Phyllis's flock and herds. I will not be harsh on him again. I should have done the same myself," added Algy's daughter with charming candour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Snowdrop of Farnorth is "out of her time," her mother says: she is no longer an apprentice, but entitled to her diploma as one of the modistes of our district. Miss Benton speaks very favourably of her powers, and Mrs. Bland has already availed herself of the services of the pretty sempstress. John Dalton and his wife congratulate themselves that they have not sent their only child to "sarvice."

It is Sunday, and John does not wear the working suit which his dainty daughter avoids so religiously. Copious ablutions with soap and water have removed the red-ochre stains from every part of his face, with the exception of the eyelids; a clean white shirt and coarse broad-cloth replace the fustian of every-day wear. John is a very fine-looking man, but I do not think his Sunday dress becomes him so well as his iron-stained garb.

Ann Dalton also is in her best array. She has "donned" her blue "merino"—she pronounces the

word with the true English "i" well emphasised—and her thick black hair is neatly braided under her close net cap. Ann is still a very handsome woman, and the expression of her face is much softened and improved since we last saw her. John had been in the habit of complaining about his wife's fierce temper in his early married days. He had said that he tried "baith coaxun an' brayun, an' nowt did." Our Farnorth peasantry rule their households with a strong arm in general, and I can easily believe John was not backward in asserting his prerogative; but the strength of his fist was, as he himself admitted, powerless to stay the vixen tongue of his wife. It is years now since the gigantic miner has raised his hand to chastise his helpmate. "Our Polly" has quite subdued her savage temper. It is almost an affecting sight to observe this woman's manner to her beautiful child. There is something even grotesquely touching in the efforts she makes to improve her coarse dialect when she talks to her daughter. All her neighbours will tell you how patiently she slaves, far beyond midnight sometimes, to provide more delicate food and raiment for her "bonny barn" than John's wages would justify.

I am very much afraid the Snowdrop of Far

north does not properly appreciate all this disinterestedness. She is decking herself now in the last new dress which her mother's industry has provided for her, but she sighs as the glass—a very small one set in a painted wooden frame—reflects her pretty figure. Her dress is only a coarse merino, and though she has exerted her utmost ingenuity to fashion it in good taste, the result of her labours does not give her satisfaction. A smile however dimples her lovely face as she ties the strings of her showy bonnet, and her eyes brighten as she covers her hands with a pair of real kid gloves. The Snowdrop's hands are rather large and not well formed, but they are soft and white, and she shudders when they come in contact with the coarse, toil-grained palms of her mother.

John Dalton was talking in a loud excited tone to his wife as Mary left her bed-room.

"I'll larn the reets on it," he said. "Dick Allonby tell't me as he sä her last neet we' a chap, an' I *will* knä wä it was."

The Snowdrop glided gracefully into the room at this moment; her mother surveyed her with admiring eyes. Mary was about to sweep past her parents, but her father stopped her.

"I'se gitten summat ut say to the', Polly," he said. "Wä was't thou was we' last neet?"

A faint colour, like the pink of a sea shell, tinged the fair cheeks of the Snowdrop, but she answered haughtily—

"I do not understand you. I went yesterday to Becklands to receive some order from the housekeeper. I may have spoken to some acquaintance as I returned home. I really can hardly remember, and I don't see that I am accountable to——"

"Thou doesn't see that thou's *accountable?*" said the miner, working himself into a rage. "Thou may nack, an' thou may nack; I car' nowt for the' nacking. If I thowt thou was dewing owt thou sudn't, I'll be——, but I'd mak' thy showders acquent we' a rope's end."

Mary Dalton trembled, and the tears rose in her beautiful eyes. Her mother came to the rescue.

"I'd like ut see the' touch t' barn," said Ann. "Your fath-er an' me has been fratching, Joy," she added, turning to her daughter, and substituting, out of deference for that young lady's fastidious taste, the second person plural for the obnoxious "thou." "He says that Dick Allonby sä you last neet standing, happen a quarter of an hour, toking to a girt big chap; and your fath-er says he mun knä wä it was, for he's gitten it en

till his head that it's yan as means na good; sä you mun tell him, Joy."

It was with great labour that Ann Dalton had weeded all the different cases of the second person singular out of her discourse; and I don't think the result attained was worth the trouble, for the more genteel "you" was as much out of place in her strong Farnorth dialect as a fine lady would be in a kitchen.

"I met Tom Armstrong and spoke a few words to him. I did not see any one else; so it must have been he that Dick Allonby saw," said the trembling Snowdrop, whose grammar was infinitely better than her principles.

"Nay," said the miner, with quite a relieved air, "if it was nobbut Tom Armstrong thou was we' I'se gitten nai mair ut say. Tom's a decent chap. I wad be fain thou sud keep company we' him, an' he's knä'n the' sin thou was t' height o' six penn'orth o' brass. Gang the' ways ut school, mi lass; thou'se happen be o'er late."

Mary was not slow in availing herself of her father's permission.

John Dalton is a rough, illiterate man, who knows nothing whatever of the Caspian Sea, nor indeed of any other sea save the one which washes this coast. He also slaughters the Queen's Eng-

lish with excessive barbarity; but he is thoroughly honest and truthful, and it never entered his head to suspect that his "lile Polly" was deceiving him, when, all white and trembling, she had told him she was only speaking to her old acquaintance, Tom Armstrong, last evening.

"I'se sorry I flyted t' barn," he said to his wife, when they were once more alone. "T' poor lile lass was quite freetened, bless her heart. I wad nivver raise a hand till her for o as I said; but I was fair mad we' what Dick Allonby tell't me. I thowt happen as yan o' them offcomes as com' till this Bole had gitten ho'd on her, and she' nobbut a barn, and cruel bonny," said the penitent father.

Ann improved the occasion, and rated her husband soundly. She also indulged in disparaging remarks on poor Tom Armstrong, who had long been a victim to the charms of the Snowdrop.

"He's nin fit for my barn. Our Polly's bonnier nor any of t' leddies in t' country side. She sud marry a lord," said the proud mother.

Foolish thoughts and vain regrets flutter the heart of the Snowdrop of Farnorth as she hastens onwards, with her smartly-bound prayer-book in her hand, to take her class at the Sunday-school. She trembles still as she thinks of that interview with her father. I do not believe she has one

spark of natural affection for the hard-working miner, who toiled so many extra hours in order that his only daughter should be "book larned." Ann Dalton's ambition for her pretty child ranged far beyond the plain, solid education to be acquired at "t' Naitional School." "Her barn sud larn amongst t' quality," she said; and although that was of course impossible and out of the question, the Snowdrop was sent to a day-school where the daughters of our small tradespeople were educated, and the miner's daughter mingled with children of a higher grade than her own, and was made acquainted with all the polite branches of literature, and soon learnt, amongst other acquirements, to be very discontented with her social position. How fervently she often wished that she had been born a lady! How she hated the mean rooms of her only home, and detested the sight of her father's red-stained clothes! How she despised her unhappy parents! Perhaps they were not her real parents, she sometimes thought, and she hugged the delicious doubt; perhaps she was only their foster-child, and some day her own father and mother would come in a fine carriage, just such a one as my Lady Plantagenet's, and bear her away with them to live for the rest of her life in those realms of bliss where silks and satins

were articles of every-day wear. She thought that, under such circumstances, she could be condescendingly tolerant of her coarse foster-parents. The Snowdrop had bought, and eagerly read, some of the penny periodicals, and saturated her weak brain with sentimental froth.

Zoé Harding and Mary Snowe were busily engaged with their different classes when the miner's daughter, flushed with her hurried walk, entered the school-room. There was no day in the week so welcome to the Snowdrop of Farnorth as Sunday. She wore her best clothes, and glided about amongst the "quality" who regularly attended the school, and felt altogether another person to the little sempstress living in John Dalton's cottage, modelling dresses for the farmers' daughters, and even employing her needle for the upper maid-servants of the district. Mary Dalton has not soared very high in her vocation as yet. I think economical Mrs. Bland is the only one of the "quality" who has availed herself of her cheap services.

The little mistress of Becklands is always very kind to Mary Dalton. She admires the girl's beauty, and if it had not been for the good sense of Madame, the Snowdrop would have come in for the reversion of some of Zoé's silk dresses. The

French lady had decided some years ago that the rustic belle was not "*d'un bon naturel.*" She was very vain and weak, Madame declared, and she persuaded her pupil not to add fuel to the flame of this vanity by dressing her in finery unsuited to her position. In spite of the good lady's advice, those new kid gloves which the Snowdrop had fitted on her hands with so much pride, as also the pretty ribbon which made her bonnet so smart, were both of them the gifts of the little heiress.

The miner's daughter has struggled very hard with the provincialisms which fetter the purity of her English. She has endeavoured to imitate Mary Snowe's soft south accent, but more than a *soupçon* of broad Farnorth still pervades her speech. The children of her class are thoroughly Blankshire in their feelings, and the Snowdrop's kid gloves, and her pretty ribbon, and all her "nacking," as they irreverently term her efforts to speak well, do not overawe or subdue the rebels. "She's nobbut Polly Dawton," they say, and they will not curtsey to her, although her services to aid in their enlightenment are given as gratuitously as those of the gentlefolk. Tears of mortification rise in the eyes of the ambitious child of the miner as the young savages persist

in thee-ing and thou-ing her with most unwelcome familiarity. It is the sharp thorn in her Sunday rose.

Zoé came forward and spoke a few kind words to the Sunday-school teacher, who took infinite pains with her nominative and objective cases as she replied to the little mistress of Becklands.

"The Snowdrop expresses herself so remarkably well," said the heiress to Mary Snowe. "Don't you think so, La Bonté? It is a pity she cannot fill a better position."

"Horace was saying exactly the same thing this morning," answered her friend. "He really takes quite an interest in the little girl, and he has asked me more than once to employ her to make my morning dresses. Horace is so kind hearted and thoughtful that——"

The conversation had shunted on to a dangerous line, and Zoé became suddenly most attentive to the irrelevant answers of a young catechumen.

The sonorous bells of the parish church summon the catechists and the catechised to attend evening service, and Mary Dalton, after marshalling her refractory pupils into their sittings, joins the choir in the organ-gallery. She has a fresh sweet voice, and she lends it to the church that she may avoid the degradation of sitting in one of the free pews,

probably tenanted by some "nebbur" of Ann Dalton's, a juxtaposition with whom would be excessively unpalatable to the pretty Snowdrop.

It is quite dusk when the evening service is over, but the miner's daughter does not hurry home; she loiters on her way, and turns up a road which does not exactly lead to her father's cottage. If Dick Allonby be anywhere near, he will see the same "girt big chap" he saw "last neet." A tall figure is bending over Mary Dalton, and, in spite of what the Snowdrop has said, I do not believe it is the figure of Tom Armstrong.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VERY unwelcome conviction gradually impresses itself on the mind of Sir Mortimer Plantagenet; it is in vain his vanity seeks to disguise the unpleasant fact—it will assert itself. The provincial heiress does not properly appreciate his numberless attractions! Instead of dropping down at his feet, like the rest of his sulphured pheasants, this shy little bird appears to be shot-proof. His majesty of Foxcroft has fired some of his most irresistible bullets with his wonted precision of aim, and not a feather of the pretty plumage has been ruffled. The iron man's daughter, as Monseigneur contemptuously terms her, has just glanced at some of the showy wares which the mighty pedlar of love has submitted to her; but she has evinced no farther interest in them. Zoé is attracted and fascinated by my Lady Plantagenet's winning manners; she pities, and almost likes, poor, gushingly-attired Miss Winifred, but she is simply indifferent to the charms of the magnificent Baronet. And Sir Thomas Marsden is

daily growing more pressing, and the descendants of the chosen people are very difficult to deal with!

I think Sir Mortimer would not be sorry to dispense with the red-whiskered rival, whose powers he despised so much when he first undertook to bring down the rustic heiress. Love is blind, but self-interest is never afflicted with ophthalmia. The mortified Baronet has made the discovery that the plumage he cannot ruffle is easily stirred by the presence of the soldier. Poor little Zoé is not an accomplished actress. It is true she has thrown dust into the eyes of Horace Snowe. She has chilled his warm heart, and made him sufficiently wretched by her cold, distant manner—but then the tawny-bearded giant is no coxcomb; he does not favourably interpret those many signs and tokens which his majesty of Foxcroft has observed, and which, if they had been elicited by the wooing of that accomplished monarch, would have instantly posed him as a triumphant conqueror.

My Lady Plantagenet and her son have just returned from Becklands. They have graced Mr. Harding's dinner-table with their presence. The Baronet has had an opportunity of admiring all the many luxurious appointments with which the Midas of the North has surrounded himself. I have already alluded to those magnificent enter-

tainments with which the master of Becklands astounded Farnorth. The dinner of this day will not lessen his reputation.

The Baronet is talking to his mother in her dressing-room. Sir Mortimer's handsome face is slightly flushed; there are traces of ill-temper in the whole of his general aspect. The *insouciant* languor of his ordinary manner has altogether vanished; he is evidently earnestly interested in what he is discussing. Lady Plantagenet is lying on her couch, listening to her son. She smiles occasionally at his abnormal vivacity. She is too much his ally, in this respect at least, not to be taken fully into his confidence, and so the Baronet, at some considerable sacrifice of his vanity, is acquainting his mother with the unpleasant discoveries he has made in the matter of Horace Snowe.

"I have had my suspicions for some time," he says, "and this day has quite confirmed them. This puling, bread-and-butter Miss is spooney on that —— hulking Rufus."

The Baronet must have been very much excited or he would not have used such strong language. I do not like him, but I must admit his manners and style of conversation are refined enough in general. You know he has a wholesome horror of the cabbage and shears which are quartered on

the Plantagenet coat of arms, and his sensitiveness on this subject makes him religiously observe the outward polish at least of a gentleman.

"I thought this rival was to give a piquant flavour to your wooing," says my lady, with rather a malicious smile. "You are not going to strike your colours at the first broadside, Mortimer?"

"I will nail them to the mast rather," responds her son. "I will sink this gaudy ship if I can, *madre*, but at present my prospects look gloomy. There must be a great quantity of *bourgeois* blood in this little provincial to lead her to admire a great vulgar fellow like that."

"He is not vulgar, Mortimer; on the contrary, he has very good manners, and is handsome; not so handsome as my son in my eyes, but I think most women would admire him."

"At any rate, from what Houndly says, the man is very little better than an adventurer. I cannot conceive what on earth induces this iron man to admit him to such close intimacy—a man about whose antecedents he knows nothing, and who is, whatever you may say, a great, coarse, vulgar beast into the bargain. I owe it to myself not to be worsted in an encounter with such an antagonist."

"You must throw more real ardour into your pursuit, if you wish to be successful," says the

diplomatic mother; "hitherto you have given the fire of your admiration to Clara Silvester, and handed only the dying embers to Zoé; you must reverse your tactics in future."

"I suppose I must," assents the Baronet, with a sigh.

"We have dined twice at Becklands," says her ladyship. "We must return Mr. Harding's hospitality."

"If he dines at my table he must not expect any of the expensive delicacies with which he loaded his to-day; *my* position is too well defined to need such adventitious aid. A Plantagenet can dispense with the vulgar ostentation that may be necessary for a mere nobody, who, as Giles Houndly says, does not know his grand- ——"

"Mr. Harding," interrupts my lady, who has no great fancy for discussions on the subject of birth, "does not appear to me a happy man. His face lights up whenever he addresses his daughter, but at other times he strikes me as being singularly grave and careworn."

"I hope there is nothing fictitious about the splendid atmosphere which surrounds him," says the Baronet, with some energy. "A leap in the dark would indeed be fatal, and ——"

"The fact of his great wealth is confirmed by

every one. In these income-taxed days, secrets will creep out, and it has been proved to me, by more than one person great in statistics, that Mr. Harding has not less than thirty thousand a-year; he does not spend more than a third of that, so, in a few years, the accumulation will be something enormous."

"Your eloquence is irresistible, my dear mother. I will raise the banner of the Plantagenets, and do battle again with Rufus of the bar sinister. I will unhorse him, or my name is not Mortimer. Issue your invitations as soon as you like, my lady, and you will not again have reason to complain of any want of ardour in my pursuit of the golden prize."

And so my lady wrote a few quite affectionate lines to Zoé, and then she summoned the stately housekeeper, and gave her orders, and hospitable preparations were commenced. The bald-headed butler and his powdered colleagues are gloomily indignant as they burnish up some of the Plantagenet silver, which has scarcely seen the light of day since the last baronet entertained a royal personage. My Lady Plantagenet intends to dazzle the eyes of the little rustic heiress.

She does not invite many persons to meet Mr. Harding's family. The Grandlys, real county cedars, are honoured with pink-toned notes. The

Grandlys are not even on bowing terms with any one family in Farnorth with the exception of the Plantagenets, and this excessive exclusiveness has obtained for them an amount of consideration and respect which nothing else could have secured. The Grandlys are not rich, but table-cloth is displayed in their establishment to a very large extent. If old Grandly has only a chop for his dinner, it is served on glittering silver, and liveried retainers remove the solitary cover. When he appears on the bench, which he only occasionally does, all the other magistrates are dumb in his presence. He is a pig-headed, dogmatical old person, but his haughty, pompous manner carries all before him. His elderly young daughters have a very limited amount of pin-money, but whenever they appear in public, Farnorth raves about the elegant simplicity of their cheap muslins. Young Grandly holds some diplomatic appointment, and his name has a place in the "Who's Who?" of the current year. Giles Houndly would tell you something about them, but Giles has a ghoul-like appetite for feeding on the dead past, as we know, and I am not going to repeat any of his "they says" on this subject.

I think Zoé would have declined Lady Plantagenet's invitation if it had not been for her cousin

and Mrs. Silvester. The latter most indignantly protested against a refusal. "The Plantagenets are nearly the only people worth visiting in the neighbourhood," she said. "Poor papa was as particular as I don't know what about the people he invited—so very different to Theodore. Poor papa would never have allowed me to associate with a man like ——"

Zoé, dreading what was coming, was glad enough to silence her aunt's maundering, by consenting at once to write an affirmative answer to my Lady Plantagenet's note.

Algy's wife has wagged her tongue very freely about that story confided to her by Mrs. Bland. Farnorth is by this time made acquainted with all particulars, and it is not a little shocked. Scandalous matter-of-fact is much less to be endured than scandalous mystery. "The man's taste for painting is easily accounted for now," Giles Houndly says. "Farnorth must not boast about its exclusiveness again, ma'am, after it has admitted into its society a drawing-master's illegitimate son." Giles couples Horace's name with an uglier word when he discusses the matter with his male acquaintances. I think, if he be not more careful, his grey hairs will not entirely protect him from the soldier's vengeance.

The cousins were each very differently affected by Mrs. Bland's gossip about poor Horace's parentage. Clara has really all that pride of caste which she has so unjustly imputed to little Zoé; and she almost shudders as she thinks of the more than interest she has taken, and still takes, in this Pariah of society. Clara is a slave to the rags and tinsel of Vanity Fair; and although a desire for riches is her great master-passion, rank has also its charms for her. If she had all the golden prospects which brighten the future of her cousin, she would not unite herself with Horace Snowe; and yet all her efforts have been powerless to break the strong fetters which bind her. The scorpion stings her, and she cannot crush it.

Zoé ponders over the sad story with the greatest sympathy. Tender pity joins that hidden tenant of the child's heart, which she has laboured so hard to expel. The new inmate does not scare her as the other unbidden guest has done. She forgets the close affinity between the two, and welcomes this last gentle visitor without alarm or dread. There is something in her manner now, when she meets the soldier, which causes his strong heart to flutter, and vain hopes spring up from the graves of their dead brethren, only to perish beneath the

icy breath of reason and common sense. Clara's bitter tongue is busy during this period.

"I told you there were budding orange blossoms in my Lady Plantagenet's caressing manners," she says to poor Horace; "they will blossom very shortly now; will you be one of her majesty's loyal subjects when she reigns at the palace? My little cousin will queen it haughtily. Who would believe so much pride and ambition lurked beneath that calm, soft surface. Shall we meet you at Foxcroft to-day?"

It was not very probable Sir Mortimer should have invited his dangerous rival, and, indeed, what would the Grandlys have said and done, if they had been seduced into such close contact with the tabooed soldier. The Grandlys had hesitated about accepting Lady Plantagenet's invitation, when they heard they were to meet "those people from Becklands." The Grandlys' high position was maintained, as I have said, principally by their excessive exclusiveness. What if the foundation of their grandeur were to be shaken by collision with these *parvenus!*

Mr. Harding does not plant his genealogical tree anywhere about his walls, and so it has pleased the grand tertiary formation of Farnorth to apply the term of *parvenu* to him. The county

cedars have waved their haughty branches at his "mushroom magnificence." Mr. Giles Houndly, whose descent we know is so pure, has prated about "nobodies" and "mulish pedigrees which ignore the jackass father." I have allowed the master of Becklands to rest under the imputation of plebeianism hitherto, but I shall not permit the Grandlys to turn up their aristocratic noses at a man more than their equal in every respect. If Mr. Harding be somewhat of a democrat in his sentiments, it is not because he has any reason to blush for his origin; he is quite as well, if not better born, than any of the Grandlys in the country.

Nothing could exceed the tender *empressement* Sir Mortimer threw into his manner, as he greeted the iron man's pretty daughter. Clara only came in for the grey ashes of his majesty's polite attentions. "This affair is about to culminate," the haughty beauty whispers to her father; "King Cophetua will scarcely glance at the beggar maid this evening. I told you our monarch meant to free his fettered acres by fettering himself."

The Grandlys returned very stiff salutations when Lady Plantagenet presented her guests to each other. The Miss Grandlys, who were arrayed as usual in the elegant simplicity of book-muslin,

which had already paid more than one visit to the laundress, surveyed the more elaborate toilettes of the cousins with supercilious eyes. Poor Miss Winifred, who, I am sorry to say, also shivered in white muslin, and had her sash tied in a very juvenile fashion, was very kind and courteous in her manner to the Becklands party, and indeed exerted herself so much to talk to Zoé's grave father, that she drew upon herself a great many amiable speeches and delicate inuendoes from her brother.

The dinner-table groaned under the weight of magnificent glittering silver, which had been exhumed for the express purpose of dazzling the eyes of the rich man's daughter. I believe Zoé was quite unconscious of its presence, but Clara remarked all this splendour, and as she watched the many crimson-liveried serfs, who humbly ministered to the king of Farnorth, she more than ever envied that subtle influence possessed by her cousin, which enabled her at any time to call the owner of all this stately grandeur her own; and yet Algy's daughter had, with her usual discrimination, formed a very low estimate of Sir Mortimer's character. "He was a contemptible creature," she said, "a frothy soap bubble, borrowing all his gay colouring from the brightness of his position." She did not thus stigmatise him to Zoé, for she

fully intended her to become the mistress of Plantagenet Park, and she exerted herself not a little to bring about this desired result. The Baronet has lavished no inconsiderable amount of admiring attention upon Clara as we know, but Algy's daughter was far too sophisticated to be in the slightest degree dazzled by any of his majesty's fine flashy compliments. "King Cophetua," she said, "had no intention of marrying the beggar maid, however much he might admire her." She had immediately detected that his pursuit of the heiress was a genuine, earnest chase; and so, as she could not reign herself at Foxcroft, she was contented to accept her post as confidante and prime minister of its little queen. "It will give me the standing-room where I can plant the fulcrum with which I mean to raise the world," the ambitious girl smilingly tells her father.

Throughout the whole of dinner, Monseigneur is prodigal of languishing looks and tender sighs. My Lady Plantagenet casts an eye of approval on her son, and many telegrams pass between the muslin-robed aristocrats. The icy reserve, which envelopes old Grandly, thaws a little as the generous wine circulates, and he condescends to acquaint Algy, who is his next neighbour, with every particular attending his last fit of the gout.

"'Gad, I'm on the look-out for the same enemy," says Algy. "My cousin Shorthorn is a martyr to it. He's put on very slender rations now, and there is the old Viscount."

Algy is not above the very natural snobbishness of alluding to his aristocratic connections. "My cousin Shorthorn," garnishes his dialogue very freely in public. The reference has considerable effect on this occasion; every particle of ice melts away from the old cedar, and Algy and he have advanced to a very tolerable degree of intimacy before the dessert is placed upon the table.

Young Grandly is seated next to Clara, but he is not very devoted in his attentions to the beautiful girl. The black lappel of his coat is relieved with tiny morsels of crimson ribbon, suggestive of foreign orders. Young Grandly is the victim of an unfortunate passion for the wife of a foreign potentate, and is quite blind to the charms of unmarried ladies. His sisters discourse freely on the subject of "Adolphus' unhappy attachment," and Adolphus never for one moment forgets to pose himself in accordance with his *métier*. Clara watches the affectations of the disconsolate lover with an amused air; she emits some brilliant flashes, which rather scare the diplomatist, who does not speak of her in favourable terms to his

sisters when the dinner is over. Those young ladies, who have glared at her beauty with rather envious eyes, listen with complacency to Adolphus' disparaging words.

During that half hour in the drawing-room which succeeded dinner, Mrs. Silvester was very loquacious. Zoé had the mortification of hearing her aunt twaddling to her heart's content about poor Horace Snowe. My Lady Plantagenet listened attentively to all the details, but the Miss Grandlys preserved a stony indifference throughout. The ladies of Rose Cottage were scarcely above low water mark in the eyes of these patricians, so how could they be expected to take a grain of interest in any of these scandalous particulars about the plebeian soldier? They are shocked, these young ladies who sigh over their brother's "unhappy attachment," that anything so improper should be discussed in their presence.

"Although I have told my brother everything," Mrs. Silvester said, "he still persists in allowing this man to come to Becklands. Poor papa was so particular, but Theodore is as obstinate, as obstinate," she continued, with her usual felicity in similes.

"I am surprised Mr. Harding should be so tolerant," said Lady Plantagenet. "The poor young

man is blameless, but unfortunately in this world the sins of the father are visited on the children."

"His father *only* a drawing-master, too!" said Algy's wife, emphasising the adverb with excessive contempt. "I cannot understand how the Miss Snowes could think of adopting——"

"It is altogether a very sad story," interposed her ladyship, who saw by the heightened colour in Zoé's cheek that the little girl was preparing herself for a vigorous defence of her dear friends. "I hope you have brought some music," she added, turning to the Misses Grandly. "I anticipate quite a musical treat this evening."

The Miss Grandlys *had* brought their music; they always took it with them everywhere; and without further pressing, they commenced incontinently a grand bravura duet, with a magnificent disdain of any conventional harmony between the two voices, which could not be too greatly admired. The swoop with which the elder sister's bird-like fingers came down upon the instrument was appalling, and her shrill soprano voice made the lustres of the chandelier tremble and vibrate as she called on the husky notes of her sister to propound some amatory problem. When the duo was over, Clara took her place at the piano, and her soft full tones very soon summoned the

gentlemen from the dining-room. The Miss Grandlys admit that Miss Silvester has a fine voice, but she has been badly taught, they tell their brother. Adolphus agrees with his sisters, and then abstracts himself from music, singers, and listeners, poses himself in his favourite attitude, and pensively thinks of his love.

Sir Mortimer does not relax in his attention to the heiress after dinner; he is, if possible, more devoted than ever. His majesty looks remarkably handsome and elegant as he leans over his innocent prey. Poor Zoé is only mortal, after all, and she cannot help feeling a little flattered as his majesty's graceful compliments caress her ear. Sir Mortimer's eyes brighten as he marks the slight ruffling of the plumage of the pretty bird; he throws yet more tender meaning in the words he whispers during the noisy din the sisters Grandly are raising. "She will soon drop down at my feet," Monseigneur thinks complacently.

"Your last victim is a genuine admirer," Clara says to her cousin on her return home. "Even my cynicism cannot impugn his motives; he is attracted by your own *beaux yeux*, señorita, and not by *les beaux yeux* of your *cassette*. It is Phyllis herself, and not the flocks and herds, this noble shepherd covets."

"Is your ladyship satisfied with your son?" says Sir Mortimer, with an air of triumph to his mother. "I think the banner of our knight of the bend sinister is a trifle torn and earth-stained. This evening has been my battle of Worcester, my crowning mercy."

"That last battle has yet to be won, my dear boy, but your prospects are brightening. No woman could resist my handsome son when he exerts himself as he has done this evening. My best wishes attend your wooing, Mortimer. I shall be very proud of my pretty daughter-in-law," says her ladyship, as she bids her son good-night.

CHAPTER XX.

Clara had just finished dressing one morning, when a hasty and peculiar knock at the door of her room announced the coming of her father. Algy scarcely waited for permission to enter, before he rushed into the presence of his daughter. He was considerably excited, and held in his hand the supplement to yesterday's 'Times.' It would seem that the destiny of the Silvester family was fated to be influenced by that portion of the great vehicle of wisdom and knowledge.

"'Gad, Clarry, what do you think of *that?*" cried the cadet of a noble family, as he pointed to an advertisement in one of the columns. "Why, it was only the other day we put in something of the kind ourselves. Do you think this is all on the square, my queen of beauty?"

The advertisement was short enough. Algernon Charles Silvester was requested to call at the office of Messrs. Ferret & Co., Caveat Buildings, and he would hear of something to his advantage.

"It looks well on paper," said Clara, as she returned the supplement to her father.

"It may only be a trap set by some confounded creditor to find out my whereabouts," suggested Algy, dolefully. "By George! though, I am a precious deal too old a rat to taste the toasted cheese before I have looked for the wires, and that they will find."

"Didn't you tell me you had seen the death of one of your relatives alluded to in some paper?" said Clara, suddenly.

Algy shivered a scent-bottle to fragments with the emphasis he brought his fist down on the table.

"By Jupiter! you are right, as you always are, *ma belle!*" he cried delightedly. "It was Aunt Aggie who figured in the left-hand corner; I'll be bound the old lady has thought of me before she slipped her moorings. I was always rather a favourite of hers."

"Was she rich?"

"So, so, before she married. She was on the shady side of fifty when she went in for that little game. The man she took for better and for worse was a widower with two children—one an idiot, I believe. He was twenty years younger than poor Aunt Aggie, and led her a terrible life before he took good ways and died. I tell you what, Clarry,

I must be off to the little village without loss of time."

And so at breakfast Algy told his brother-in-law that urgent business summoned him to London. "We must really think about making our exodus when I return," he added, throwing out a feeler. "You will think we have quartered ourselves upon you for good and all, Harding."

The master of Becklands made some courteous reply, but it was not altogether a satisfactory one to Algy. "He don't mean us to stay much longer, Clarry," he said to his daughter, with a woe-begone air. And, indeed, Mr. Harding had no intention of allowing his relatives to remain, as his brother-in-law had said, for good and all at Becklands. His sister had evidently perfectly recovered her health; country air was no longer necessary for her; and setting aside the fact that her past conduct had not entitled her to any particular claim upon his affection, the good lady, if truth must be told, bored her brother very considerably. Algy's horsey manners, and Algy's horsey conversation, interlarded as it was with vulgar slang and vulgar oaths, did not suit the refined taste of Zoé's father. The cadet of a noble family had made some effort to adapt himself to the "stiff pragmatical nabob," as he called his brother-in-law,

but his efforts had not been successful. All the polish which once probably glazed the surface of Algy's manners had been entirely rubbed away by constant contact, for the last twenty years, with jockeys and low swindlers, and so he could not make himself a suitable companion for the man that Clara had compared to Le Grand Monarque. Mr. Harding would willingly have retained his niece permanently in his household, but he could not of course separate their only daughter from her parents. I do not fancy, therefore, he will throw any great impediment in the way to prevent the threatened exodus of the whole family.

It is impossible for me to describe the horror Clara feels at the prospect of returning to that terrible vagabond scrambling life, which the ease and luxury of the last three months has made her still less able to endure. "I must bring on this marriage between the Baronet and Mademoiselle Tartine," she says; "it will give me another chance;" and she applies herself assiduously to this task.

Sir Mortimer Plantagenet has not by any means won his battle of Worcester yet; that crowning mercy is not gained. The feeble spark of interest which he had kindled with so much pains would have quickly died out if it had not been kept alive

by the constant fanning of Algy's daughter. The Baronet little suspects the excellent ally he has in beautiful Clara. She sings his praises morning, noon, and night. She constantly impresses on her young cousin's mind the disinterestedness of the monarch's evident admiration. Sir Mortimer might aspire to the hand of the wealthiest lady in the land, Clara says. Well born, possessed of a fine estate, and so singularly handsome and fascinating!

I don't know whether this perpetual braying of the trumpet gave much pleasure to Zoé, but it induced her to blush and appear slightly confused whenever her eyes encountered those tender glances which the Baronet fired, at all times and at all seasons, in the direction of the little heiress. Monseigneur construed the roses and flutterings very much to the satisfaction of his vanity.

The fortnight which is to terminate poor Horace's stay at Farnorth is fast drawing to a close. Tears are plentiful enough at Rose Cottage; the maiden ladies cannot reconcile themselves to this enforced parting. Mary Snowe's eyelids were swollen with weeping when she accompanied her nephew in his farewell call at Becklands.

Zoé cannot trust herself to look at the soldier; and in order to preserve her self-control, she

infuses more ice than ever into her manner towards him. She devotes herself to her dear La Bonté, and leaves the discomfited and unhappy man of war to find some consolation in the lovely sympathising eyes of Algy's daughter. The poor little Spartan watches the tall, handsome man who leans so tenderly, as it appears to her, over her beautiful cousin; but still she talks to Mary Snowe, and smiles a sickly smile, whilst the hidden teeth are very, very sharp to bear. And the leave-taking is over at last, and Zoé's trembling little hand has been clasped for a moment in the soldier's broad palm, and some frozen words have fallen from her poor pale lips, and Horace has said good-bye in cheery tones; and indeed the two miserable hypocrites have behaved remarkably well, and have passed through the fire of Moloch in a creditable manner. The feeble flowers of hope which have blossomed in the soldier's heart, sunned by Zoé's gentle pity, are withered enough now. "She does not care for me," the poor fellow moans, and life appears one arid barren waste to the unhappy son of Emmeline Snowe.

"What a stoic you are, my little cousin," Clara says. "Do you really care for this huge piece of humanity? You can call him your own at any moment, señorita. You will not? You do not care

to purchase Cupid's wares! Bah! it is all the same in the end. I tell you *les beaux yeux de nos cassettes* never lose their lustre. Call back the martial shepherd, Zoé; nay," the arch-deceiver added, suddenly changing her mocking, satirical tone for one almost tender in its earnestness, as she marked the bitter tears gathering in the eyes of her young cousin, "I will say no more, *petite ingénue.* I think if I had dreamt this poison would have become so dear to you, I would not have sullied the cup to keep it from your lips. I did it for the best, but I am very sorry now; I cannot retract what I have said. This nameless soldier *is* attracted by your wealth, Zoé—it is only natural."

"Oh, *don't*, Clara—pray, *don't!*" cried the poor child, piteously; and then the stoical self-control and dignity were all swept away in a passionate burst of tears, as she rushed from the room.

Clara did not venture to follow her. There was such utter desolation in the fair young face, so much entreating pathos in those pleading tones, that a feeling almost akin to pity rested for a moment on the hard heart of Algy's daughter—only for a moment. Clara was not one to entertain angels unawares, and the gentle visitor had left that barren resting-place before the door had

closed upon poor little Zoé. "Pshaw!" she says; "is my couch so free from thorns, that I must needs whimper because of this Sybarite's one uncurled rose-leaf?" And her thoughts wandered to her own overshadowed future.

She will not leave Farnorth—of that she is fully determined. She will not return to that hideous life, with its debts and duns, its skulking from creditors, its wretched shifts and contrivances, which she has known for so many miserable years. She will not leave Farnorth; she will bask in the rays of that sun of prosperity which shines so brightly at Becklands, even if the warmth has to fall upon her at a little distance from that Eden. She will remain at Farnorth; she will not leave the vicinage of that lurking mystery which the rich man hides. Clara is still daily and hourly searching in the maze. She is weary with watching and waiting, but her resolution is firm as ever. "The footprint cannot always elude my eyes," she says; and her flagging spirit recovers new vitality with the comforting thought.

In spite of the keen womanish pain gnawing at her heart, Clara rejoices over the soldier's departure. "When he is once gone," she says, "I shall overcome this weak unworthy feeling, and her babyship will be less difficult to manage. Made-

moiselle must console herself with well-cut glass instead of diamonds; the facet turned to her at present is bright enough to dazzle her childish eyes."

Poor little Zoé, sadly ashamed of that late stormy outbreak, has rejoined her cousin, and the post has come in and brought with it a letter for Clara from her father. Algy writes in high spirits. "It was no trap baited by cunning creditors, Clarry; you were right, as you always are. Old Aunt Aggie has left me residuary legatee, and guardian as well to her precious idiot step-daughter. A charming ward, *ma belle;* but I shall pocket about three thousand pound when all the legacies are paid off."

Clara does not specify this sum when she acquaints her cousin with her father's good fortune.

"The star of the Silvesters is shining at last," she says; "you will still retain us for your neighbours, Zoé; I cannot leave Farnorth. The green fields and the green trees communicate their verdancy to my feelings; I shall become as fresh and innocent as you in due course, *petite cousine.* Papa must take some cottage in the neighbourhood suited to our limited means. Is that pretty ivy-covered nest I noticed the other day to let, do you know?"

"Papa is certain to know all about it," replies Zoé, eagerly—[she is anxious, poor child, to efface from her cousin's mind all recollection of that break-down]. "Come with me, Clara; I heard papa go into the library some little time ago; he is at home, I know."

The two girls proceed to the sanctum of the master of Becklands.

Zoé opens the door hurriedly: her father is not alone; he is talking somewhat excitedly, and in a foreign tongue, to a tall bearded man.

"Papa!"

Mr. Harding starts at the sound of that voice.

"What do you want?" he says, impatiently. "Don't you see I am busy? Go away, child!"

Zoé hastens from the room.

"What is it that has disturbed the smooth polish of my Lord Chesterfield?" Clara enquires, when she and her cousin have once more reached the drawing-room.

"It is that nasty Frenchman!" Zoé cries impetuously; "I cannot bear him!"

Clara is all eager attention now.

"Then you know this ill-omened *crapaud?*" she says, striving to speak calmly.

"I have seen him once or twice before. He does papa almost as much harm as the Straits of

Dover. He is a Monsieur Ferné, the managing partner of the firm with whom papa has entered into a contract to——"

Algy's daughter cannot repress an impatient sigh.

The Master of Becklands enters. All trace of irritation has left his face; he advances gaily towards his daughter.

"Have I not told you, little girl, that there is no admittance except on business into that blue chamber of mine?"

"But it was business I came about, papa," says Zoé, smiling; "and I did not know you had that nasty Frenchman with you. You shan't go across the Straits of Dover again, papa," she adds, wilfully.

"The mountain has come to Mahomet, and so Mahomet need not go to the mountain. And now, Mademoiselle, what is it that you want?"

Zoé quickly informed her father of all Clara had told her, and supplemented the news with the wishes of that young lady in the matter of Ivy Cottage.

"I believe it is vacant at present, but you will look strangely out of place in the small rooms, Clara," says Mr. Harding, who does not altogether relish the proposal.

"I must leave off silk dresses and wear cotton, of course," replies Clara. "I shall feed poultry, and devote myself to innocent pursuits; you will honour our humble dwelling with your presence occasionally, will you not, my dear uncle? We shall be feeble planets, borrowing our light from your glorious sunshine in the eyes of Farnorth. You must come with me at once, Zoé; I shall have no rest by night or by day, until I have seen my future home." And the little girl laughingly complied with her wishes.

It was a pretty dwelling enough, this Ivy Cottage, with a tiny conservatory and a sloping lawn; but Zoé agreed with her father that her beautiful cousin would be sadly out of place in the small rooms.

"You regard my humble nest from the height of your own magnificent eyrie, you proud young eaglet!" says Clara; "but if you had led the mountebank life that I have, you would not despise such a cosy shelter."

This sounded remarkably well, and Zoé's tender heart was quite touched by her cousin's bitter allusion to her past life; but I don't suppose Zoé despised the small rooms of Ivy Cottage one-half so much as Algy's daughter did.

Sir Mortimer, mounted on a fine horse, and

attended by his groom—the Baronet was a very timid rider—met the two girls as they were returning from their visit of inspection. He dismounted immediately, dismissed his horse and groom, and courteously insisted on escorting the cousins. The facet he turned to Zoé during the walk was very brilliant; it really glittered with all the prismatic colours of the diamond.

It was quite dusk when they neared Becklands, but it was sufficiently light for them to be able to distinguish two figures, who suddenly separated from each other as they came in sight.

"Who is that rather pretty girl?" said the Baronet, fixing his glass in his eye, as the Snowdrop of Farnorth glided past them.

"It is our peasant belle," replied Zoé; "she is the daughter of a miner, and is considered to bear away the palm of beauty from every one in the district."

"She *is* pretty," said Sir Mortimer, languidly. "I am a little short-sighted, but was not that Mr. Horace Snowe who was talking to her just now?"

"I believe so," answered the little heiress, very quickly; and she wondered what Horace could possibly have to say to Mary Dalton, and why he had moved away so rapidly. It was very extraordinary, she thought. But I don't think it was at

all extraordinary that the soldier should avoid the chance of meeting his fortunate rival, and, moreover, I know that Horace had reason to hurry himself to catch a train—I certainly do not know why he had loitered on his way to speak to Mary Dalton—he had business to transact ten miles away from Farnorth, and he must return home again that night.

"The soldier allows his admiration for beauty to carry him beyond the bounds of prudence," Clara said to her cousin; "it is well Mr. Giles Houndly did not see him this evening," Zoé did not venture a word in reply, but the shaft rankled, and she thought more than once of that interview so suddenly broken off when they approached.

The Baronet passed the evening at Becklands, and shone with great lustre. Zoé's father was very bright and cheerful, but watchful Clara noticed his potations were deeper than usual; she observed as well, that he did not remain in the drawing-room after dinner nearly so long as he was in the habit of doing; the evening concert had no male auditor save Sir Mortimer. Monseigneur listened with wrapt attention when Zoé was the performer, but he did not observe a rigid silence through Clara's songs; indeed he took the opportunity of breathing his most tender words and

sighs into the ears of the little heiress, when her cousin's voice was most thrilling. Sir Mortimer has no soul for music, and he is heart and soul in his pursuit. Clara does not even have the embers of his ardent speeches now, fire and grey ashes are both given to Zoé. I think his majesty must have quite ached with shining when he shook hands with all the ladies at the close of the evening. He gave a very favourable report of his progress to his mother; but he yawned a good deal, and complained bitterly of the trouble it took to wing this shy bird.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was long past midnight when the up train stopped at Farnorth to discharge its one solitary passenger. Becklands was not far from the railway station, and Horace had to pass its lodge-gates on his way to Rose Cottage. Some indefinable feeling induced the soldier to linger for a few moments as he reached the handsome entrance which led to Mr. Harding's dwelling, and he noticed that the gates, instead of being closely shut and locked as usual, were partly open. The same unaccountable feeling, which had arrested the soldier's steps, impelled him now to enter, and he strolled slowly along up the wide, thickly-planted avenue. Sad thoughts held their revels in the heart of Horace Snowe, on this his last night at Farnorth. An inexpressible longing to gaze upon the casket which held his jewel, seized upon the soldier, and determined him to advance towards the house. He stopped for a moment to kindle his cigar, and I am afraid this paladin of modern days vented one or two mild imprecations as the matches missed

fire; but the soother of woes was at length lighted, and with its pale blue smoke curling from his lips, Horace continued his slow walk until he reached the front of the large stone-faced building. He strode to and fro for some minutes, and occasionally raised his eyes towards the upper windows. A dim night-light relieved the obscurity of one of the rooms. Horace was well acquainted with the geography of the house, and he knew the light proceeded from Mr. Harding's dressing-room. Suddenly this pale solitary star increased in brilliancy, and, in a few moments, the whole window was so brightly illuminated, that it was clear the night-light had ignited some inflammable substance in its vicinity. Horace, dreading the fire would spread, rushed to the door, and pulled the bell violently; he still kept his eye fixed on the illuminated window, and he saw the flame continued to increase. Presently there was a sound of shivered glass, and thick smoke poured from the window! It was no time for ceremony; the soldier again rang the bell, and struck violently against the door. To his astonishment, it yielded at once to his efforts; the same hand which had left the entrance-gate open had been at work here. Horace did not stop to syllogise as to the cause of this neglect, but took immediate advantage of

it, and found his way, as best he could, up the large winding staircase. On his passage, he raised that most appalling of all cries which can fall upon the sleeper's ears, "FIRE!" When he had gained the landing, he struck a match, and the light burned long enough to guide one so well acquainted with the house as he was, in the direction of the burning room. He knocked violently at the door immediately adjoining. There was no answer to his loud summons. Horace could feel, by the difficulty he had in breathing, that the smoke had penetrated into the passage. In his despair, he called yet more loudly, and tried desperately to force the lock of the door. It resisted all his efforts for some time, but at length one vigorous push overcame the strength of the bolt, and the soldier rushed in. Just at this moment a light appeared, held in the hand of black Sam, who was trembling with cold and terror. "Leave the light," said Horace, with an air of calm command, which had its effect on the terrified negro. "It is your master's dressing-room which is on fire; call all the servants together; collect what water you can, and you will easily put out the flames. I will attend to Mr. Harding."

The master of Becklands was lying half dressed in an easy-chair by the fire. He was breathing

heavily. Horace remarked a small empty phial on the table near him. The unhappy rich man had been compelled to force sleep, as, alas! he so often was. The soldier shook him by the arm, and called on him loudly to awake; but the drug held the sleeper in its chains, and so Horace passed his strong arms round his waist, and fairly carried him out of his room and through the stifling passage.

All the house was by this time astir. At a moment less terrible, the assembled group would have elicited shouts of laughter by their eccentric appearance. Their faces were corpse-like, and they were well-nigh paralysed with terror. Zoé had risen at the first loud ringing of the bell, and had dressed herself hurriedly. She advanced rapidly forward, with a wild expression in her lovely eyes, as the soldier appeared, bearing in his arms the apparently insensible form of her father. Horace answered the appealing look with cheering words, "Mr. Harding is a little overpowered with the smoke," he said; "I will carry him into the dining-room where all you ladies must attend him—you will easily restore him. I must lose no time in heading my terrified fire-brigade. Do not alarm yourself, Miss Harding; your father will recover directly, and we shall easily put out the fire."

Mrs. Silvester, attired in a very primitive costume, appears. "Oh, my heart is palpitating like I don't know what," she wails perpetually to Madame, who, true to her motto that "*un peu de toilette ne gâte rien*," and who would, I firmly believe, have attired herself becomingly for the gallows, is neatly dressed, and does not pay the least attention to the lamentations of Algy's wife. Zoé and her cousin devote themselves to Mr. Harding, and the master of Becklands shakes off his lethargy, and his calm words chase that wild terrified look out of his child's face.

The fire was not so easily got under. Before it was extinguished, Horace's fire-brigade was joined by a Jeeames, whose neat dress and downcast air proclaimed him at once the culprit who had left that open gate and unclosed door. The soldier gave him a look, which the unhappy Plush very well comprehended; but his negligence has led to such good results, that I do not fancy the master of Becklands will ever learn anything of the midnight *escapade* of Plush and Powder.

Great exertion, and a considerable amount of water, at length put out the flames. The walls of the room are all blackened, and the furniture charred. Horace's left hand and arm are very sorely burnt; Mr. Harding is quite distressed as he looks at the

wound, and Zoé has some difficulty to restrain her tears; but Horace makes very light of it, and thinks the smart of his arm well repaid by the gentle look of pity in the pretty Peruvian's eyes.

"I must bid you good night," the soldier said; "if I delay my return to Rose Cottage much longer I shall seriously alarm its kind inmates;" and he turned a deaf ear to the suggestions of the master of Becklands, that he should remain where he was until his wound was properly dressed.

"I will call up the old doctor on my way home," he said; "and I do hope you will all be advised by me, and return to the nests from whence I scared you." And, so speaking, the soldier took his departure.

Dr. Banques' surprise was so great when he answered the hasty summons of the wounded man of war, that Horace had to acquaint him with every particular connected with the fire before he could induce him to look at his injured arm.

Galen wore a very grave aspect as he examined the burns.

"The cuticle is raised from the shoulder to the fingers," he said. "You must apply at once for an extension of furlough, Mr. Snowe; it may be some weeks before you will be able to join your regiment."

I don't think Horace was altogether sorry to hear this decision.

You may easily imagine that great consternation prevailed at Rose Cottage when the soldier made his appearance with his left arm in a sling; it was fortunate the wounds were wrapped in cotton wool, and so hidden from the tender eyes of the spinsters.

"At any rate you will have me for your guest a little longer," Horace said, after he had given them a *resumé* of the night's events; and certainly this assurance consoled them very much.

The fire at Becklands formed a topic of conversation at Farnorth for the whole of two days. The gossips had devoured the fancy ball down to the very bone; they had discussed every portion of that sad story about Horace Snowe's parents, and their appetites were very keen indeed for some fresh morsel.

How did the fire occur? Oh, that was easily accounted for—the night-light had flared up, as even Price's patents may chance to do, when his ample directions are not properly attended to, and the sudden flame had caught the muslin curtains—there was no mystery about that. But what a *very* sound sleeper Mr. Harding must be. Mrs. Silvester had acquainted every visitor that "Mr.

Horace Snowe knocked at my brother's door loud enough to awake the dead, and Theodore slept like I don't know what. I am sure the first ring of the bell startled *me.* I have had palpitations ever since; and I am as weak, as weak. So very extraordinary my brother did not awake. He might have been burnt in his bed; but, indeed, he had not gone to bed at all, he was sleeping in an easy-chair, half dressed—so very odd, was it not?" And Farnorth thought it *was* very odd, and the mystery was a pleasant tit-bit for some hours; but a much more delicate morsel presented itself when Giles Houndly, Esq., suggested another cause for wonder, in the fact of the soldier's opportune presence.

"What was the red-coat doing, wandering about the grounds at such an hour?" Giles said. "Ahem! the maid-servants at Becklands are pretty I am told, ma'am; and they say that this artist's son is a great admirer of beauty. And they say, too, ahem!——" but I am not going to chronicle all the venom of this wicked old viper.

Sir Mortimer Plantagenet was not by any means pleased when he was told of the heroic part Horace had played in that night's danger. The Baronet languidly repeated some of Giles's "they says," and shrugged his shoulders in a very

mysterious manner whenever the soldier's prowess was alluded to in his presence. Mrs. Bland's love of twaddling triumphed over her good nature, and she circulated the seeds of scandal with great industry. "Young men will be young men," the relict said; a truism which no one ventured to dispute, but which gave, nevertheless, a very unpleasant colouring to poor Horace's adventure.

The inmates of Becklands heard nothing whatever of all this gossip and scandal. Mr. Harding was truly grateful to the brave man who had rescued him from a horrible death; and he spoke in such terms of him as to cause Zoé's heart to flutter more than ever when she thought of Horace Snowe.

That frail bark, which the monarch of Farnorth had launched with so much care, went down to the bottom of the sea; and the soldier's flag was triumphant. Clara did her very utmost to strip away the halo of romance from the whole affair. Algy's daughter would very gladly have dispensed with this episode of the fire. One of the greatest evils likely to result from it was, in her opinion, this burnt arm, which might detain the soldier for some weeks longer at Farnorth. After she had reconciled herself to his departure—after she had, as she said, so far sullied the cup which held

the sweet poison as to render it unpalatable to her young cousin—after she had so laboriously striven to keep afloat the baronet's miserable canoe—to think her efforts were to be rendered null and void by an ignited curtain! It was too provoking. She would not allow that there was anything heroic in the soldier's conduct. "The warrior of Farnorth only anticipated black Sam by a few moments. The negro would have acted quite as well as Mr. Horace Snowe," she said, "and not have posed himself as a hero afterwards."

This was a most unfair aspersion on the poor fellow, who certainly had not made much of his services. I know that in her heart Clara worships her fetish. I know it gives her pain thus to strike down and disfigure her idol; but she would endure ten times the amount of suffering, if, by so doing, she could torture and torment her little cousin.

The gentle dove, pity, which had once rested for a moment on the heart of Algy's daughter, will never venture again on that arid, fiery sand. With the return of the soldier, there is a return also of that black feeling—born of jealousy and envy—to overshadow more darkly still the whole of this woman's nature. The conviction that her marvellous beauty, her brilliant talents, her many charms and fascinations have not awakened one

half the interest in the heart of the only man she has ever cared for, that the inferior graces of her despised cousin have done, is more bitterly mortifying to Clara Silvester than I can tell. "I have not her golden attractions," she says; but she does not really believe the soldier is influenced by Zoé's heiress position. "She shall never know he loves her," she repeats fiercely. "She shall never marry Horace Snowe."

The ill-natured "they says" of Giles Houndly did at length reach the ears of the inmates of Becklands. I need scarcely say that the gossip was disseminated by the amiable relict.

"Not that *I* believe a word about it," she says to Mrs. Silvester, who is a very interested listener. "It certainly was very odd that Mr. Horace Snowe should have been wandering about the grounds; but he might have seen the light from the road, and yet that could scarcely be, for the trees quite hide the house; but still it's not likely such a gentlemanly young man as Mr. Horace would really care to sit in the servants' hall and talk to the maids as Mr. Houndly says—he has the most spiteful tongue, you know—and after all there is no harm in looking at a pretty face, whether it belongs to a duchess or a dairy-maid; and you

and I have lived long enough in the world to know, Mrs. Silvester, that young men *will* be young men."

But Algy's wife will not accept this truism at all in extenuation of Horace's supposed misdemeanour.

"Pretty faces, indeed!" she says. "I call it disgraceful. I hope my brother will have his eyes opened at last. It is most surprising to me. Theodore makes as much fuss with this man as if he was the heir to a dookdom."

And the good lady did her best to couch the master of Becklands for mental cataract, and drew upon herself no little amount of indignation by so doing.

"Theodore is quite infatuated," she informs her friend and gossip. "He was as angry as angry with me for mentioning, as I considered it my dooty to do, what you had said. My brother is so very different to me—he has no pride; indeed, he never would have made that low marriage—disgracing the whole family as he did. Wasn't it dreadful to have such a low connection forced upon one—a barmaid, Mrs. Bland!"

"I suppose she was very handsome?" says the relict.

"People said she was; but I never saw her of

course, you know. Papa would not see Theodore again, and he left all his money to me, as I told you. I had a hundred thousand pound to my fortune; but you know what has become of it," whines Algy's wife, running into the old familiar groove.

"You say Mr. Harding was not happy in his first marriage?" says the widow, who is never weary of listening to all the details of this event in the past life of the Midas of the district.

"How could he be happy?" demands Mrs. Silvester, querulously; "he went in the face of his own father—and children who disobey their parents never come to any good, as I often tell Clara, who does not always treat me with the respect she ought to. Children are not what they were in *our* day, Mrs. Bland," continues the lady, who frequently deplores the decadence of the present generation; "but, as I was saying about Theodore's disgraceful marriage, his wife was as vulgar as vulgar—and then she had *such* a temper—and somebody told us she drank like anything—and dying as she did five or six years after the marriage in that miserable way! Don't you call it a judgment on disobedience, Mrs. Bland?"

"It must have been a great relief to your

brother when his wife died," remarks the listener; ignoring that reference to judgments on disobedient children, and thinking probably that Harding senior had anticipated an avenging Providence, when he had left his only son utterly penniless.

"I really don't know. Theodore was quite silly about her; he was so much in love with her, you know."

"There were no children by this first marriage, were there?" enquires the widow.

"I never heard there were any; but Theodore is as close as close—he never mentions his first wife. I think he is ashamed of having disgraced his family. I suppose you will very shortly be having a wedding at your house, Mrs. Bland, now?"

The relict's daughters now join the gossipping pair, and the little bride elect has the satisfaction of hearing her mother drift into a sea of twaddle about her economical preparations for the celebration of the ceremony which was to transform Sophy Bland into Sophy Middleton.

Sophy's couch was not all made of roses; there were some sharp thorns hidden in the perfumed leaves, and those which wounded her the most were planted by her mother. The two Miss Middletons, sisters of the Reverend Archibald,

were to be her bridesmaids. "And you know they are accustomed to live in a very stylish manner, Mrs. Silvester, and I really don't know how we shall manage," the widow informed her friend. Her poor daughter knew perfectly well how mamma would manage. She knew that though the relict would certainly make a change for the better in her *cuisine*, the Miss Middletons would be incontinently informed of this improvement in their normal fare. "Why need she tell them that we don't have fish and soup every day, and that she has hired Mrs. Jellybags to cook the dinners during their stay?" says poor ambitious Sophy to her sister, with tears in her eyes; "and please don't say anything about your uncle's marriage, mamma," she ventures to suggest to that garrulous person. "Why not, my dear?" demands the mother; "every family has its troubles:" and the unhappy daughter knows perfectly well that the wooden leg will be very freely stumped about. "I shall have John in to wait every day whilst the Miss Middletons are with us," the widow says; but the decision brings more pain than pleasure to Sophy. Mrs. Bland is not generally fortunate in keeping her one male retainer for any length of time together in her service, and she is guided in her choice of a successor to the departing man-of-

all-work entirely by the fact as to whether or not the new candidate will be able to wear the half-worn livery of his predecessor. The livery is of itself somewhat peculiar, being altogether a hybrid affair. The retainer's mission is to groom and drive the relict's ponies, and keep her garden in order. He always waits at dinner on Sundays, but he does not shine in that department; and Sophy positively shudders as she thinks of John, whose livery is very much too large for him—the widow is not always successful in measuring her recruits by the eye—waiting at table, with his hands made helpless by their enormous white gloves, or appearing in their primitive simplicity of warts, earth-stains, and universal redness—waiting, I repeat, at table, behind the chairs of the aristocratic Miss Middletons, who are accustomed to be ministered to by a daintily arrayed butler and plush-clad footman!

"Weddings are very expensive things, Mrs. Silvester," says the relict; "I shall have to economise more than ever to make up for the outlay. Sophy's *trousseau* has cost a good deal, with all my contrivances. I was determined not to touch her own money; you know she has only a thousand pounds, and ——"

"The widow's confidential communications were

brought to an untimely end by the appearance of Lady Plantagenet, who was accompanied by no less a person than Miss Grandly. [I don't know why her ladyship brought this aristocratic person with her, for she must know, as all the world does, that the Baronet flirted most abominably with her at one time.]

If the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland had suddenly appeared as a simple morning visitor in the Becklands drawing-room, her august presence would scarcely have awakened more astonishment in the minds of Mrs. Bland and her daughters than Miss Grandly's appearance did. The widow rose at once, and, with her two girls, took a very hurried departure. My Lady Plantagenet held out her hand to them at parting, but her companion only honoured them with a stony stare. "We cannot expect the Grandlys to notice us," the relict said humbly; "they are the first family in the county. I am so surprised Miss Grandly has called at Becklands." And she went about scattering this news all over Farnorth.

The fire at Becklands formed naturally the principal topic of conversation of the morning visitors.

"Do you know, my dear," Lady Plantagenet said to Zoé, "Mortimer is quite envious of

this Mr. White, who it seems played the part of a hero."

"You mean Mr. Snowe," said the little heiress; and the tell-tale colour overspread her face.

"His name is Snowe, is it? Ah, yes, I remember; there is some unhappy story connected with his birth, is there not?" she enquired languidly.

"I believe so," Zoé answered hurriedly, and then Clara came to the rescue, and the poor little girl was very thankful to her cousin for turning the conversation into another channel.

My Lady Plantagenet embraced Zoé quite affectionately at parting, and whispered, loud enough for Miss Grandly to hear, some almost tender message from her son. Zoé blushed again, not so brightly as she had done at the soldier's name, but the anxious mother drew a favourable augury from the partial triumph of Lancaster over York.

Mrs. Silvester chose to consider that the alarm of the fire had made her very ill, and Dr. Banques was summoned to attend her. There was nothing much the matter with Algy's wife, but of course it did not suit the doctor's interest to tell her frankly that she ailed nothing.

"A little derangement of the nerves, my dear madam," he said; "a very natural sequence to

the fright the fire must have occasioned you. Mr. Snowe is really very seriously injured."

Clara was reading a French novel, and was seated in the bay-window of their private boudoir. Her attention was arrested by the mention of the soldier's name, and she condescended to listen to the conversation between her mother and the doctor.

"The Miss Snowes are very nervous and anxious, and they wish to summon further advice," continued the doctor, in rather a piqued tone. "I have recommended Dr. Halley. I held a consultation with him some years ago, when Miss Harding had the scarlet fever; I never saw so virulent a case of ——"

"Oh, yes; you have said so over and over again," interposed Algy's wife, who, like most prosy people, was intolerant of prosiness. "I suppose he is a *real* doctor?" she added, with an unfair stab at her companion's brevet rank.

"He has a French degree, I believe," replied Galen, ignoring the puncture; "at least I know he told me he had studied in Paris; and that reminds me of a very odd coincidence. I saw Mr. Harding at the station with the very Frenchman who startled Halley——"

Clara's book fell from her hands on to the floor;

the doctor looked up at the interruption, and Mrs. Silvester uttered an impatient exclamation. Algy's daughter quickly gathered up her novel, and was presently, to all appearance, absorbed in its pages.

"Such a strange thing," said the doctor, proceeding with his story; "just as I was thinking of sending a telegram for Halley to see this identical man. Mr. Harding told us at the time that it was a Mossoo something or other with whom he was anxious to enter into an iron contract, but Halley could not get over the start he had had for some time. He said he never in his life saw such a resemblance between any two persons as there was between this iron merchant and an old Parisian acquaintance of his, who was a mad-doctor, and conducted a ——"

Clara's heart gave one great bound. "I beg your pardon, Dr. Banques,—what was the name of Dr. Halley's friend?" she enquired, her voice, in spite of all her efforts, trembling with the strength of her emotion.

The doctor was quite flattered by the interest his anecdote had excited, for haughty Clara very rarely spoke to her mother's medical attendant.

"I cannot exactly remember his name," he said, "it was something like Nasty, de Nasty I think. I shall never forget how Halley bounded away

from me when the carriage, with the Frenchman in it, passed us as we were walking up the avenue together. This iron merchant only popped his head out of the window for a moment, and the doctor was off after him like a sky-rocket; he could not overtake him though."

"Will you kindly give me Dr. Halley's address?" said Clara, her voice still trembling. "Papa has an imbecile ward, and he mentioned in his letter this morning, that he wished to meet with some Maison de Santé, where she would be well taken care of."

The despiser of falsehood was coining at the devil's mint with wonderful dexterity.

Doctor Banques wrote the address of his medical brother, and handed it to Algy's daughter, who compelled herself to receive it with as calm an air as possible.

"Thank you," she said; "papa may already have heard of some establishment, but I will mention this one to him."

"What is all this about idiots and madhouses, Clara?" demanded Mrs. Silvester peevishly. "You and your father are always so mysterious."

But Clara scarcely heard her mother's words; her temples were throbbing, her heart was beating loud and fast. If her back had not been to the

light, the doctor must have observed the unnatural brilliancy of her eyes.

The footprint and the bent twig had appeared at last.

The huntress was on the trail.

END OF VOL. I.

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